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MARY CHRISTMAS

by Mary Ellen Chase



LITTLE,
BROWN
AND
COMPANY

A delightful short novel by
the author of "Mary Peters" and "Uplands."

NEW EDITION

Mary Christmas

By Mary Ellen Chase

When Mr. Wescott came home one day *wearing his collar and tie* it was a sign that some event of unimaginable importance was about to occur. The strangely beautiful story which followed is of the passionate Armenian woman peddler—Mary Christmas—and her dramatic pilgrimage from village to village along the coast of Maine. Mr. Wescott's politics, the mingled delight and embarrassment of all his family at the exotic gifts of their strange visitor, the tales of Etchmiadzin—all are told with a humor and insight which are unforced and with a reality which makes them not only a fact but a romance to the reader.

How she became the symbol to the Wescotts of "far-off things," and of an intensity of feeling which but for her they could never have known, is told with unusual beauty and with a voice that speaks to the spirit.

"The poetic appeal of this little story is very persuasive. There is all the romance of beauty and strangeness in the figure of the Armenian peddler woman who brings to the little Maine villages a breath from another world."—*The Boston Transcript*

"Mary Ellen Chase has portrayed a phase of American life in 'Mary Christmas' which has heretofore been overlooked. We should be grateful to the author for reminding us of it in such a charming manner before it has been forgotten completely."—*The Chicago Evening Post*



An Atlantic Monthly Press Book

MARY CHRISTMAS



BY HIS SIDE WALKED THE STRANGEST PERSON
THE FOUR WESCOTTS HAD EVER SEEN

MARY CHRISTMAS

BY
MARY ELLEN CHASE



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MARY CHRISTMAS

*His candle shined upon my head, and . . . by His
light I walked through darkness. . . .*

*My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew
lay all night upon my branch.*

THE BOOK OF JOB

I

CONCERNING A COLLAR AND TIE

LONG years ago, in those speedless days of the late nineties when children dropped homemade curtsies and said, "Yes, ma'am" and "No, sir" quite as a matter of course, when they recited the sixty-three books of the Bible, the kings of Israel, and the twelve disciples according to St. Matthew without the least idea of achievement, when baby specialists and motion pictures were almost unknown, and when the efficacy of spring-time asafoetida-bags and of sulphur and molasses taken according to the magic rule of three was sponsored by the most intelligent of parents — years ago, on a certain warm day very early in the month of June, the four Wescott children, who were swinging on a white gate beneath great elm trees, were startled by the most curious and, for the duration of a long half-hour, quite inexplicable behavior on the part of their father. At high noon, just as the church clock was

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sending twelve mellow, wavering notes down through the sunlit air to cling unseen to tree-tops or to hide in daisy fields — at high noon he came up the street in full view of his neighbors, and halted with no apparent embarrassment before his four awestruck children, *wearing his collar and tie!*

Now, at the imminent risk of ruining the artistic value of this story, — for we know only too well what it means to stop a truly dramatic incident when it wants to go on, — we must, in all fairness to the father of the four Wescotts, on the one hand, describe — since we cannot explain — a certain distressingly peculiar habit of his, and on the other, assure our readers that neither he nor his wife nor his four children had ever because of it suffered the slightest lessening of social standing in their community. For years, during the months of May, June, July, August, and September, it had been Mr. Wescott's deplorable custom to traverse the distance between his law office over the village grocery store and his home with his collar and tie in his left hand. Otherwise

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his appearance was above reproach. His neat gray suit was immaculately pressed and brushed, his neat straw hat was placed at a most conservative angle, his neat black shoes shone from his own early-morning labor, the gold-headed cane which he always carried bespoke the gentleman that he was. But — *his collar and tie hung from his left hand.*

No one felt entirely sure as to the date and origin of this custom. Mrs. Wescott, who, it will be readily granted, should have known more about those matters than anyone else, was not secure in her mind concerning them. It is true that once, in the strictest confidence, she disclosed to Mary, the eldest of the four Wescotts, her belief that the habit had originated in those overheated and perilous days when Father Wescott had been doing his best to save the country in general and the State of Maine in particular from the election of President Cleveland. She furthermore advanced the opinion — which, as Mary grew older, she was inclined to share — that the continuance of the habit should be interpreted as

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silent proof that Mr. Wescott stood ready to defend with all his might the Republican Party with its splendid principles of "honest money and the chance to earn it." These, however, logical as they seemed, were only theories. Mr. Wescott himself afforded the only source material, and that material was unfortunately impossible of access, since the whole question with all its ramifications was one which, Mrs. Wescott and her four children had tacitly agreed, was never to be referred to whether in or out of the family circle.

It may easily be surmised that this habit of Mr. Wescott's had been the source of no little embarrassment to his wife and children, and their splendid loyalty cannot, indeed, be too highly commended. Imagine, if you will, any number of situations in which the recognition of such an extraordinary practice might well have redounded to the discredit of the family, and you will appreciate the truly fine material of which these people were made. But as Mrs. Wescott said, again in confidence to Mary and to Cynthia after she was ten, since they had

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endured the visit of the Governor of Maine, they need have no fear as to anything which the future might hold in store for them.

The gubernatorial guest dined with the Wescotts on an August noon when Mary was eleven, just ten months, in fact, before the beginning of the events which make up this story. He had communicated his nearness to Mr. Wescott, who had hurried home at ten o'clock to warn his wife, to change his clothes, and to decree blue serge for the children. As Mrs. Wescott tied a new tie for him under a fresh collar, misgivings would arise in spite of her, and more than once a warning trembled on her lips. But she controlled herself, true even then to her sense of loyalty, and reasonably secure in her faith that he could not, in view of the distinction about to fall upon the family, so far forget himself. Imagine, then, her distress when, an hour later, she saw her husband conducting their distinguished guest up the street, his head erect and crowned with the top hat which he had chosen for this unusual occasion, his clean collar and new tie gently swinging from his left hand! Imagine, too,

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the consternation of the children, who sat primly on the front porch in Sunday serge, the girls in Mother Hubbards, the boys as Lord Fauntleroyish as serge would admit, and rehearsed their salutations. Can the mild remonstrance which sprang to Mrs. Wescott's lips as she stood in the doorway to receive her guest be wondered at?

"Father, how *could* you!" she said in an undertone, after the Governor had been duly presented. The accusing eyes of his four children, who were engaged in making their curtsies and bows, added poignancy to her thrust. His eyes followed their hostile glances, and his cheeks colored. One could only believe that he, the author of their disgrace, had been, up to this moment, entirely unconscious of the incriminating articles in his hand.

It is extremely comforting, however, to be able to assure our readers that no dire results followed this act, which we must believe to have been quite unpremeditated on the part of Mr. Wescott. The Governor having been shown upstairs by Mary Wescott to wash, he repaired hastily to his own

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room, from whence he emerged almost simultaneously with his honored guest, his appearance entirely conventional and his native gallantry unimpaired. But although the dinner was a complete success from every point of view, although upon his departure the Governor assured his hostess in most lavish terms of his deep regard for her husband, the ensuing legislative season was an anxious one for Mrs. Wescott. Was it not possible, nay even probable, that habit might assert itself even in the State capital? This fear so plucked at her that she was tormented by frequent nightmares, in the worst of which she saw her husband on a freezing winter day emerge from behind the white marble pillars of the government building, descend the long flight of steps, and walk through the city streets to his Augusta hotel, his collar and tie in his hand. Her cries awoke Cynthia in the next room, but to her startled questions her mother confessed only vaguely to having seen in her sleep a most terrifying thing. Nor were Cynthia's far more insistent morning queries productive of anything more definite.

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Relief came in the shape of a legislator and friend from a neighboring town, who, upon meeting Mrs. Wescott at a county convention of the church, remarked in the course of conversation that she would never know her husband in the ultra-dignified gentleman who lent tone to the State Senate. Circumspect as were his words and uncompromising as was his manner, Mrs. Wescott could only infer that he meant to allay her fears, and the sense of freedom which she henceforth experienced, in spite of her embarrassment at the time of the conversation, was immeasurable.

Nor must we for a moment allow our readers to imagine that this habit, which we have been at such pains to describe, had ever in the slightest degree impaired the really enviable position which the Wescotts maintained in the community. The energies of Mr. Wescott had been dedicated, not merely to the affairs of his State and nation, but to those of his native village as well. Her he had served, in the phrase of the Scriptures, from his youth up. Fence-viewer and Pound-keeper at twenty, he had

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passed successively through the lesser town offices until now, on the fair side of forty, he was Moderator of the annual Town Meeting, First Selectman, and, most honored of all positions, Judge of the Municipal Court. Mrs. Wescott, in spite of the facts that she had never played bridge in her life, that she belonged to no Women's Clubs and had never given an afternoon paper on "A Brief Survey of English Literature," and that woman suffrage, a measure at that time in slight favor among some Western states, had received from her only a kind of pitying amazement, was held in deepest respect by the village at large and was, moreover, I dare say, a very happy woman — that is, as women go. As for the four Wescott children, Mary, Cynthia, Roger, and John, they were quite as promising as it is ever well or needful that children should be.

And now to return to our exasperated story, which, for the last ten minutes, has been fuming with impatience.

Years ago, on a certain warm day very early in the month of June, the four Wescott

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children, who were swinging on a white gate beneath great elm trees, were startled by the most curious and, for the duration of a long half-hour, quite inexplicable behavior on the part of their father. At high noon, just as the church clock was sending twelve mellow, wavering notes down through the sunlit air to cling unseen to tree-tops or to hide in daisy fields—at high noon he came up the street in full view of all his neighbors, and halted with no apparent embarrassment before his four awestruck children, *wearing his collar and tie!*

They who had been too amazed to run to meet him in their usual fashion silently opened the gate for him, all having dismounted and taken their stand in twos on either side, Mary and Roger on the right, John and Cynthia on the left. They could not be mistaken in their conviction that something extraordinary had happened. Even John at five was so sure that he asked not a question. He simply stared, round-eyed, at his father's neat throat. As for the others, they were conscious of a suppressed excitement in their father's manner, which,

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added to the incriminating evidence of his unusual appearance, left not the shadow of a doubt.

They continued to stare, now at him, now at one another, as he passed through the gate without any suggestion that they follow him, and up the driveway to the house. Whatever it was, he would tell their mother first, and their part was to wait. This they did with their ears strained for the slightest sound which might serve as a clue.

Their mother was bustling about in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches to the dinner for which Mary and Cynthia had already set the table. She was singing "Shall We Gather at the River," but her sweet, plaintive assurance that all the Wescotts would "gather with the saints" was suddenly halted by the appearance of her husband in the doorway. Listening outside, the children were quick to catch the interruption. She was surprised, they knew, and they all felt for a moment an unexpressed thrill of pride that they had first experienced the sensation. Then —

"Why, Father!" they heard her say.

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Surely she also was not able to believe her eyes!

A second or two of torturing silence, during which even breathing was painful. Then the draft of the stove slammed shut, — to keep the dinner from burning, they knew, — footsteps, and a streak of blue, their mother's gingham, through the windows of the dining-room, the closing of a door. They knew what that meant. Their father had beckoned their mother to the library, the seat of all family councils, punishments, and Christmas secrets.

They might have talked then — perhaps it is singular that they did not — but, since guesses seemed futile in the expectation of such a stupendous happening as all things prophesied, they continued to stand by the gate, staring alternately at one another and at the silent windows of the library. It is altogether safe to predict, however, that each of the four, from Mary to John, cast careful, inward glances over the things each had been doing for the space of a week. There was none of them who could not easily recall certain uncomfortable sessions

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introduced in some such manner; and yet within the memory of none of them had any misdemeanor, even of the most startling import, caused such initial behavior from their father.

His sudden reappearance on the porch mercifully quieted certain misgivings in the mind of Roger, who was beginning to realize that, if he had counted ten, he should probably not have thrown the minister's son off the back fence into a burdock clump, and in the heart of Cynthia, who had not felt right for a week because she had refused to lend *Little Women* to the Closson children, who, being the offspring of a fisherman, smelt rather loathsomely of clams and fish. He came down the driveway, walking rapidly, his collar and tie still in their rightful places. As he passed the children by the white gate, he paused for a moment.

"There's company for dinner, children," said he. "Please mind your manners."

They said, "Yes, sir" in a disappointed chorus. Although they had not known exactly for what they were hoping, they all realized at once that it was *not* company

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for dinner. The announcement, in fact, was like a dash of cold water. Roger made bold to question him.

"Is it the Governor again?" he asked.

"No," answered his father. (Mary thought she detected here a slight rise of color to his cheeks, a circumstance easily accounted for if our readers will but recall that visit which brought such consternation in the wake of its honor.) Then he passed quickly through the gate and down the graveled sidewalk in the direction of his office.

The children looked at one another, all alike unwilling to recognize that the very pleasurable suspense they had experienced must be satisfied by a guest for dinner, probably by some neighboring lawyer, who would talk about the tariff and keep them too long at the table. But the older ones still clung hopefully to the strange air of mystery about their father. That and the startling innovation in his appearance could not, they told themselves, portend the usual dinner-guest.

"I suppose it will mean blue serge," sighed Cynthia resignedly, "though it's much too hot."

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"I suppose it will," said Mary.

"I can't," said Roger, all the time knowing that he could and would. "There's a baseball game at two — sharp."

John said nothing, mostly because at five it takes all one's time to keep one's mental balance in any such maelstrom of excitement as this. Moreover, he knew he must do just as he was told.

"The Parker children all have new best dresses, made especially for summer," contributed Cynthia, "muslin with dots. That makes five apiece for them."

"It's a silly extravagance," said Mary. (The words and the opinion belonged to her mother.) "Blue serge will do till Father gets the fall election."

But, to the surprise of all, the call to blue serge was not forthcoming. They heard the draft of the stove opened, and smelt the crisp, luscious odor of well-cooked meat and of freshly baked bread. They heard their mother's quick, sure steps going from kitchen to dining-room and back again. Mary and Cynthia exchanged puzzled glances. Neither could remember a time when they had not

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been called in to help with the last things about the table.

“For, even if we’re not needed, what about the discipline?” thought Mary.

The petals from the orchard trees beyond the driveway drifted through the warm, bright air like great, lazy snowflakes. A pair of bluebirds circled about in the white fragrance and in the drowsy murmur of bees.

And then Roger from the top of the gatepost gave a shout. He had seen his father’s hat just topping the hill that led from the village.

“They’re coming — whoever it is!” he cried.

II

A BLUE GINGHAM AND AN ANCIENT LAND

THEY were coming! They topped the hill; they passed the academy with its white columns and ancient date in gilded figures; they passed the Blodgett house, within which Miss Sarah Blodgett peered from the side-lights of the front entrance, mistrust and amazement in her sharp face; they passed the church with its green shutters and westward-pointing weathercock; they passed the crossroads where Pleasant Street saunters across Maple; they entered upon that long stretch of elm-shaded gravel walk, which, quite unimpaired by other houses, leads to the Wescott gate. Still the four Wescotts by that gate said not one word or made the slightest move toward going to meet their father. Indeed, they were quite too busily engaged in trying to set their mental houses to rights to do anything but stare. And stare they did!

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Their father was coming up the street, laden with a huge and shining black bag or pack, which he carried most awkwardly by means of bands across one shoulder. By his side walked the strangest person the four Wescotts had ever seen. She was tall, and the queer folds of her black dress gave place above the waist to a velvet bodice of the same color, only laced with gold cord that tied at the throat. Her sleeves were full and white, and their edges of lace fell almost over her dark, long-fingered hands. They could see that her hair was as black and shining as her bodice or as the covering of her great bundle, for the handkerchief of red silk which had once covered it had fallen back and lay on her shoulders. They saw, too, the gold coins, suspended in tiny rings of gold, that hung from her ears, and the string of great red stones around her neck. Then, as she came nearer and they stared more breathlessly than ever, Roger at the coins, John at the necklace, Cynthia and Mary at the gold-laced bodice and peculiar sleeves, they saw that she had soft, dark eyes such as they had never seen

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before — eyes which, they somehow all at once knew, had looked upon things unfamiliar and far away.

At the gate their father recalled them to their senses.

“Children, this is our new friend, Mary Christmas,” he said, lifting the latch, and allowing his guest to precede him into the driveway. “Come and speak to her.”

They came forward then with the bows and curtsies which had been, as far back as they could remember, the necessary accompaniment to the reception of all visitors; but they were surprised almost to the point of being startled when this dark stranger with the great eyes bent suddenly and kissed the hands which they gave to her, at the same time murmuring unfamiliar words.

It was just at the moment when Mary Christmas kissed the dimple between the second and third finger of John’s square little hand that Mary Wescott saw something which the others had quite overlooked. There were traces of tears on the brown face of their guest — quite unmistakable, tiny paths, which, dry as they now were, bore

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certain and tragic proof in their downward course across her smooth cheeks. And as Mary Wescott stared at those barely discernible lines, a singular thing happened to her. She who had seen tears and the traces of them in plenty during her twelve years began to feel suddenly as though she had never really seen them before in all her life. Those dry, white stains on the face of Mary Christmas were doing a strange thing to her, which she did not understand or like at all. They were shutting out all the people about her, her father, John, Roger, Cynthia, even Mary Christmas herself, the sunlight, the drifting petals of apple blossoms, and in their places were trying to show her Things which were not things at all. They were making her dimly aware that the sorrows in the world, the pitiful sufferings of the aged, the bewildering anguish of young people, the broken hearts of little children, are all a part of a great mantle of sorrow that encircles the whole wide earth in its dark, smothering folds. She drew back frightened; but just at that moment her mother, in blue gingham, appeared on the front steps.

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Now that blue gingham was a wonder-working fabric. It chased away the Things that Mary Wescott might have seen, and kept her a little girl for a whole year longer. The suddenness of it there on the porch brought back her father and the others, and, in spite of a peculiar clutching at her throat and the entirely absurd idea that she had been away somewhere, made her quite herself again. So when John, suddenly freeing himself from Cynthia's grasp, ran boldly after Mary Christmas and his father and, to the astonishment of everyone, put his hand in the dark one of the stranger to lead her to his mother, she could follow with Roger and Cynthia, smiling at his unaccustomed friendliness and sharing their eager excitement in each new happening of this most extraordinary occasion.

That dinner and the afternoon hours that followed were memorable ones in Wescott history. Mary Christmas sat at the table in the seat of honor at their father's right, those disturbing marks of tears quite washed from her face, the red silk handkerchief tied neatly over her dark hair. Appetites lan-

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guished among the Wescott children; and for once penalties were mercifully withheld from those who could eat no potato. Four pairs of eyes traveled from headdress to gold lacings, from brown cheeks, now flushed with color, to long brown fingers; four pairs of ears strained to detect among the broken, rhythmic fragments of her speech familiar everyday words that they could understand.

Mary Christmas talked not only with her lips. She talked with her brows, her eyes, her hands, her whole body, in a mighty effort to convey by means of harsh, newly found words the story of her life to these, her new friends. Her country lay far across the ocean, across warm inland seas and great sand-swept deserts. It was a high land of tumbling, rockbound red hills and towering, snow-crowned mountains, of broad valleys with streams, of wide, treeless pastures — the homes of thousands of sheep. It was a land of bitter winters and dry, hot summers, thick with dust, which the wind whirled in great storms from the bordering deserts. Against the cold of those winters the people dug their homes in the sloping hillsides, long

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narrow houses with space for both men and animals, houses roofed with sods and partitioned with stones; and these dwellings were proof also against the hot, parching winds of summer. It was a land over which people had passed for centuries, people of many races, one succeeding another in the march of years, all journeying from the East to the West — hordes of people, sweeping onward with the mercilessness of locusts or of the country's own burning wind. It was a land where in the spring snow-fed streams glistened on the high mountain-sides and slipped crystal clear through the valleys, with here and there the sound of tiny silver bells. Above all, it was the oldest land in all the world — older than India, than Egypt, than China with her walled towns, older than Jerusalem with Solomon's Temple, older than the white, ancient cities of Assyria and Babylonia. Its red hills and snowy mountains and wide pastures and clear rivers had been there when Methuselah rounded his nine-hundredth year, and when Enoch took his solemn walk with God.

Mary Christmas loved this land. Even

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John understood that. When she talked of its clear waters and of its wandering flocks of sheep, a wistfulness haunted her voice like a melody; when she explained to the puzzled children how great bands of people had again and again laid it waste and desolate, numberless years before they were born, the sadness of long centuries burdened her words; when she spoke of its great age, her tones echoed like those of the organ at church, until in one supreme outburst of reverence she rose from her chair, her face uplifted, her arms spread wide after the manner of the ancient prophet in benediction upon his people.

But even as she stood with outstretched arms and glowing face, a change came over her features. The children saw it coming, and the awe in which they had listened, wide-eyed, to her description of this far-off, ancient land gave way to a kind of enchanting anticipation of what might happen next. The sorrowful lines about her mouth hardened until they became almost cruel; her long nose, with the bend in it so peculiarly unlike any that they had seen, widened at

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the nostrils with the great breaths which she was drawing; the sad yearning which had softened her eyes faded as a candle burns itself out in a dark room, and into the blackness of their depths there came an ominous red gleam. She was no longer a poet, a patriot, or a prophet. She was one who hates, bitterly, relentlessly.

Now her voice rose like the rising wind on the bare plains of her own land.

"I live there. I play — like him — like her — like you all. I chase birds and catch falling blossoms in my hair. Then I grow up. I go to a great city — to Erzerum." To the listening children this strange word boomed like the sound of the town drum on Memorial Day. "I marry there — a good man. We have two children — a girl, a boy. My husband, he buy silks, laces, jewels, all beautiful from Persia, and sell them. We are happy. Then a year ago — when the blossoms fall — like this — the Turks come. They run through Erzerum — their horses run! They kill — they kill — they *kill!*"

Her words ended in a high succession of convulsive liquid notes. Her hands, which

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she had clasped above her head as her story mounted into tragedy, twined and knotted themselves together. For a moment grief dulled the ominous red gleam in her eyes, and the children saw with consternation that they swam with tears. But the tears did not fall, much to Mary Wescott's relief. The hard lines came back around her mouth. Again her nostrils quivered.

"They kill my husband. They want to kill me and my children — but my husband — he hide us in a cave where he keep the silks and jewels. They do not find us. If they find us — *I* kill — one — two — three! *I* kill because they kill my husband!"

The fascinated children stared, half frightened, now at their guest who dared to use a word so tremendous in its import, and who, moreover, they felt sure, was entirely capable of its actual embodiment, now at their parents, between whom they had caught in passing certain questioning glances. Their father and mother, it must be admitted, were experiencing not a few misgivings at this bloodthirsty turn in Mary Christmas' recital; for although they had not made a

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scientific study of the child from the embryo to the beginning of adolescence, they understood quite as clearly as modern parents that there are several things of which children may just as well remain in ignorance.

It was John who came to the rescue with quite the most satisfactory thing that ever happened. When the old clock on the mantel had ticked away those few monstrous, weighty seconds during which the Wescott children were about to embark their thoughts on perilous, uncharted seas, during which Mr. Wescott fruitlessly searched for new topics of conversation and Mrs. Wescott feared that her husband, for once in his life, had made a mistake in judgment, during which Mary Christmas sat with her hands knotted above her head and her revengeful words echoing in the still room, John suddenly knew exactly what to do. Nor was this strange if one stops to think about it. John was five years old — only a few short years removed from those light-filled days when he had known Everything. Perhaps some shadowy recollection of those days, some sense of that which was then lumi-

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nous and orderly, came stealing upon him like the faint fragrance of violets in a fresh spring rain. Perhaps it was the knowledge which he had then — which we all have, but so soon forget — that made him suddenly understand the nothingness of hatred and revenge.

But explanations at best are tiresome things. The important fact now is, not how he knew what to do, but that he did it. He slipped from his chair on the other side of his mother, crossed the room behind his father, and walked straight into Mary Christmas' lap with its ample folds of black. He must have walked straight into her heart, too, and driven out everything else but himself, for her arms came down and went around him, and her sudden tears made ultramarine spots on his blue gingham blouse. Then Mr. Wescott blew his nose mightily, and Mrs. Wescott fussed with the tea things, and Mary and Cynthia alike felt their throats grow big to bursting, and Roger shook a threatening fist at the surprised head of the baseball captain which had appeared in the window. And it all ended by Mary Christ-

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mas' telling them of Raphael and little Mary, aged respectively five and seven, who were staying with their aunt in Erzerum until their mother could earn enough money to bring them across the ocean to America.

"To Portland," explained Father Wescott to the children. "That's where Mary Christmas lives now, when she's not traveling about."

The four Wescotts knew Portland. For years, in fact up to this very minute, they had held it in highest esteem. It was the largest city as well as one of the oldest in the State of Maine; it had been the scene of a battle in the Revolutionary War; it was the birthplace of their favorite poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. They had dreamed of going with their father some day to see Portland — its fort, the gray battle-ships in its wide harbor, the room in which Mr. Longfellow was born. Now all at once it had become a charmless place. Its years were but moments in the light of the centuries which had passed over the land of Mary Christmas; its single combat meaningless and trifling compared with the num-

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berless battles which had succeeded one another upon those hoary plains. Even its Mr. Longfellow, venerable, indeed patriarchal as he looked in the school readers, was simply out of it when lined up for inspection between Methuselah and Enoch! Portland, heretofore a dream city, had, in view of this recent knowledge, become as dull, stale, and familiar as their own village. The one lure that it now possessed was the fact that Mary Christmas had chosen it as her new home.

“And now,” said Mary Christmas, all dark things faded from her face, “now I give gifts. Come!”

III

UNBURIED TREASURE

SHE rose from the table, still holding John by the hand, and led the way into the library, on the floor of which lay the great black bundle, like a mysterious treasure from a story-book of wonders. The excited children stood at the four points of the compass while with their father's help she unbound the cords that held it in place. At last the shining black cover opened, disclosing yet other bundles which in their turn must be undone. The few slow seconds which the great clock in the corner ticked away seemed like hours before these smaller bundles disclosed their motley contents upon the library floor.

Here were household necessities of every sort from paring-knives, metal dishcloths, and packages of tacks to needles, thimbles, and spools of thread; articles of clothing —

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overalls, elastic suspenders, underwear for children, hairpins, dozens of pairs of stockings, collars of celluloid and linen, hair ribbons of entrancing colors, shoe laces, safety pins and pins that were not safe, tape measures, soap, scissors, tooth powder — all the hundred-and-one indispensable things for which families in the outlying districts of New England in those pre-Ford days of the nineties were often at a loss. Here were toys, — rubber dolls, rattles, spinning tops, blocks, bouncing balls, and jumping-ropes with shining, many-colored handles of wood, — toys for the birthdays of some Maine farmer's children whose father could not get easily to town. And here, too, in a far recess of the smallest inside bundle, just as in the last and most precious box of an Arabian Night's treasure chest, were certain intriguing parcels wrapped in fantastic, figured papers of blue and green and gold — parcels that sent out into the Wescott library, as on the wings of some invisible bird, a rich, spicy fragrance that made one suddenly oblivious of the stockings and the safety pins.

It was from these fascinating packages

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that Mary Christmas selected her gifts — that is, for all but Roger, whose longing eyes had never left a certain red-handled jumping-rope even when that strange, heavy fragrance had floated through the room. To Mary Wescott she gave a sewing-case in glossy black wood, inlaid with tiny flowers and birds of mother-of-pearl in delightful confusion. A tiny golden key, which held all the magic of golden keys everywhere, unlocked it with an unmistakable click, and the lifted cover revealed compartments with all manner of colored silks and threads, a pair of shining scissors, and a silver thimble. There must have been magic, indeed, in that golden key, as anyone would have suspected, for as Mary Wescott looked at the inside and tried on the thimble, she wondered how darning her stockings could ever have seemed a task.

For Cynthia there was the most entrancing napkin ring, of that loveliest shade of blue which makes one think of far-away hills in a September haze and of tall spikes of larkspur in the gathering dusk; and it, too, bore flowers whose inlaid petals and tiny,

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sparkling leaves formed a wreath around the ring. Could she ever again, she wondered as she fingered it, think folding her napkin irksome or needless?

When John's turn came, Mary Christmas stood still for a moment and looked at him, standing sturdily apart from the others in his blue gingham suit, his chubby hands behind him, his wide, inquiring eyes intent upon her face. Then she laughed, like the sound of the spring streams in her own land, and drew out yet another package from the farthest recess of all. Turning her back, she laughed again, softly, as she undid the paper. Then, suddenly facing them, she took two quick steps toward John, and placed over his curly head and around his soft cheeks a silk cap made of the most bewildering colors in orderly rows and topped by the most piquant of gold tassels. What wonder that everyone applauded then, even to the baseball team that had been surreptitiously watching proceedings for a full hour from various stations about the porch and beneath the windows! For John in blue gingham, his cheeks flushed to a bright pink, his brown eyes shining with

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excitement and pleasure, some tendrils of golden hair escaping from the silken band of his new cap, which might have graced the dark head of some Eastern prince, was quite too rare a sight to be received in silence!

Mrs. Wescott was so engrossed in her youngest child that she was quite taken off her guard when her present came. She was trying to stifle a wish, which seemed to her vain and extravagant, namely, that some great painter might make a portrait of John in his new cap, when she became suddenly aware of something enfolding her like a white, fragrant mist. And there she was in Mary Christmas' present, with her children laughing at the surprise on her face and her husband standing in amazed admiration beside her.

It was a shawl, but such a one as no Wescott had ever looked upon. At first its lacy fretwork seemed indistinct and fantastic, like the frost on a January windowpane. But as the children with careful fingers lifted portions of it to look through its tiny squares and to marvel at its fineness, they saw that pictures were woven within it — pictures in

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delicate trceries of birds, butterflies, and flowers. Then Mary Christmas swept it suddenly from their mother's shoulders and held it widespread against her black skirt; and lo! across the high centre of it a flock of birds was winging its way as though across great stretches of sky. In the lower centre swarms of butterflies danced and hovered and poised among hundreds of flowers. But the corners, as Mary Christmas showed them each in turn, were the most wonderful of all. In the first, some tired sheep rested under a great tree; in the second, the moon and stars looked down upon a silent hill; a child danced in the third among falling flower-petals; in the last, a branching rosebush clambered over a high wall and sent sprays of swaying blossoms into some hidden garden. And as they looked at it and marveled, that same richly laden fragrance stole from it like an invisible presence and drifted away up the wide-mouthed fireplace, among the musty leaves of their father's old books, and through the open window into the June sunlight.

"I made it," said Mary Christmas, throwing it again over Mrs. Wescott's shoulders;

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"some in Erzerum, some in Portland last winter — I made it. Now it is yours!"

"I can't take it," cried Mrs. Wescott, finding her voice with a great effort. "It's too lovely for me — and all that work, too! John, tell her I can't take it."

But Mr. Wescott, astute in so many things, was really positively stupid about that shawl. He just stood and stared at his wife quite as though he had not seen her nearly every day for thirteen years, and made only the feeblest of protests as a weak echo to her own. Mary Christmas paid not the slightest heed to their remonstrances, except to shake her hands in a peculiarly final gesture. She was wholly concerned now with her gift for Mr. Wescott.

Now Father Wescott afforded a real problem. For him whom Mary Christmas most delighted to honor, what gift among all the articles in her great bundle was in the least suitable? She made a puzzled movement toward the stockings and suspenders, but drew back dissatisfied. She fingered cards of cuff buttons, combs in leather pockets, collars of all sorts, only to drop them almost

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immediately. The fragrant, figured parcels offered no solution. Obviously they contained nothing for a gentleman.

Then an idea came to Mary Christmas which made her halt in the inspection of her wares and laugh in glad relief. She knew now the very thing for Father Wescott, the thing that would suggest to him always the depths of her gratitude. With another of her quick movements she loosed the red necklace about her throat and threw it impulsively over the head of Mr. Wescott. It lay across his white collar and on the bosom of his white shirt, red as the geraniums in the porch tubs outside or as great drops of blood. And as Mary Christmas saw the stones pulsating there below Mr. Wescott's surprised, embarrassed face, she did a most peculiar thing. She threw herself face downward on the library floor and kissed the self-polished toe of his shoe!

The four Wescotts were quite at a loss as to how to receive this last event in such a long and overwhelming train. The laugh had died away on Mary Christmas' lips before she had thrown herself at their father's feet.

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Apparently, then, the situation was not to be considered humorous. And yet the expression on their father's face, to the older ones at least, banished seriousness. He had been sufficiently ill at ease when Mary Christmas had thrown the beads about his neck, but now that she lay prostrate before him, the embarrassment on his face had given place to a kind of empty foolishness which was irresistibly funny. So, in spite of the warning glances of their mother, they laughed — laughs which were echoed and re-echoed by the baseball team, and in which Mary Christmas, raising herself from the floor, joined, perhaps a little tolerantly.

Mr. Wescott then went to the stable, somewhat, it must be admitted, after the manner of one escaping from a situation, to harness the horses preparatory to carrying their guest and her great bundle a few miles on their way; and in his absence, while Mary Christmas tied up her wares in neat packages and placed them for wrapping in the black oilcloth, Mrs. Wescott explained to the children the reason for this singular expression of her gratitude.

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Appearing suddenly that morning in the yard of a house on the outskirts of the village, she had startled the inmates, who were quite unused to peddlers of her description, into the fear that, with her dark face, uncertain speech, strange gestures, and outlandish clothing, she must mean evil — thievery, kidnapping, or worse. Suspicious and impulsive by nature, they had not stayed to question her, but, hailing the town sheriff who by ill luck was passing by, had demanded that she be taken before the judge to answer for misdeeds contemplated if, fortunately, not performed. Such had been the source of her anxious tears, the traces of which had so nearly troubled Mary Wescott, and such the occasion which had prompted Mr. Wescott, secure in her innocence, to protect and befriend her.

They drove away a few minutes later, Mr. Wescott holding the reins and Mary Christmas beside him, her great bundle securely tied to the back of the carriage. The children waved them up the hill and out of sight, repeating to themselves her farewell words: —

“Next year when the roads are dry and

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the petals fall — like this — I come again.
You wait — for me?"

That night every Wescott dreamed of Mary Christmas. Mr. Wescott sat quite up in bed, declaiming indignantly his very words of that morning to her stupid accusers, and aroused Mrs. Wescott, who for what seemed hours had been enduring the hardships of a Monday in an Armenian kitchen. Roger killed three monstrous Turks, alone and single-handed, to avenge the death of Mary Christmas' husband; while John was a shepherd boy, tending his sheep in wide pastures and wearing a many-colored cap, at which all of his silly sheep laughed again and again. As for Mary and Cynthia, they spent the night in a whirl of excitement in which Methuselah and Enoch strove to enlist Mr. Longfellow's assistance in a headlong rush against hordes of barbarians. The State of Maine bard, however, obstinately declined to be "up and doing"; indeed, he proved himself worse than useless in the heat of the encounter, although he doubtless realized more fully than ever before the earnestness and the reality of life!

IV

A WILD CRAB-APPLE TREE

THAT winter, which everyone called an "old-fashioned" one because the harbor was frozen for miles toward the open sea and the snow blocked the roads in great, curving drifts, they planned and replanned the journey which Mary Christmas would make in the spring. Often in the evening, when the supper dishes were washed and put away, when Mr. Wescott was lost in the *Memoirs of P. II. Sheridan* and the boys were popping corn over the glowing embers in the deep fireplace, Mrs. Wescott, Mary, and Cynthia would trace her way in the family atlas, which had been purchased at some sacrifice because it featured the State of Maine.

Leaving Portland, her great pack bulging with her wares, she would doubtless take the road to Brunswick, the seat of Bowdoin College, that venerable institution which had

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been the Alma Mater alike of Mr. Longfellow and of Father Wescott. From thence she would follow the coast, passing through Wiscasset, which held the oldest deed in America in its courthouse, through the friendly towns of Newcastle and Damariscotta, through Belfast and Searsport, once famous for their sea captains and for their gracious, white-winged clippers. The roads that she would travel would be like those they knew — roads that climbed rocky, fir-clad hills and at their summits gave one far-reaching stretches of sea with surf-swept islands and towering white lighthouses; lonely by-roads that led to scraggly farms and gray farmhouses, where lived people who fought a losing fight against the barren land; elm-shaded village roads bordered by green-shuttered houses and by white gates like their own. She would cross the wide Penobscot where it narrowed enough to encourage a ferry, and, passing through Bucksport with its gray fort and old graveyard, would come by easy stages over dark, tumbling hills, on which great shadows alternately marched and rested, to their own village.

“Only you can never be quite sure,” said

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Father Wescott, forsaking P. H. Sheridan, "that she won't come through Castine. With summer visitors there, she ought to sell a lot of that hand-stuff."

Then Mary Christmas' route must be retraced just in case she did choose Castine; and they continued to bend over the map until the sharp, warm smell of burned pop-corn arrested their attention.

"Dear me, boys!" cried Mrs. Wescott. "Can't you manage just one popperful without so many old maids and burned ones?"

Mr. Wescott said nothing, but the face that he again raised from P. H. Sheridan was mildly remonstrant. He was what people called in the nineties "a great hand" for hot buttered pop-corn.

At half-past eight, filled with pop corn and a drowsy content, they went to bed to dream of Mary Christmas, while the bitterness of the cold made a solitude of the village, and the lighted windows, one by one, faded into the darkness without.

But just before the roads were really dry from the spring mud, before the falling of the apple blossoms told them that they

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might begin to watch with some certainty of fulfillment, something happened to the eldest of the Wescotts. It was, in fact, the same curious Thing to which she had been exposed on the day of Mary Christmas' arrival, but from which she had been saved by the fortunate intervention of her mother's blue gingham. This time, however, the attack came when she was alone. She had gone into a near-by pasture to hunt for early violets, and on the way home had climbed to the top of a great boulder, from whence she could look far out over the fields and woods. It was a favorite resting-place of hers, and until this particular day she had experienced only pleasure and satisfaction in the exertion of the stiff climb up the rock, in the sense of accomplishment when she had reached the top, when she could rest her warm, tired body against the trunk of a stunted pine and look out over the country. Through a vista in the fir trees she could see a sloping hillside in the vivid green of early spring, and on its summit a wild crab-apple tree, standing against the bluest sky imaginable and flushed with the pink of opening petals.

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Then it happened! The beauty of that wild crab-apple, in which for years she had taken only pleasure, began to hurt her with a pain as real and sharp as any other pain. Before this it had been just a lovely thing to which their father had pointed with his cane, so that they might not miss it as they walked on a Sunday afternoon. Now, in one incomprehensible instant, it had become lovely unto tears!

Mary Wescott was almost frightened as she sat on the boulder and looked at the crab-apple tree. She was vaguely fearful lest this sadness which its sudden beauty had made her feel would stay with her and lend an aching loveliness to other long-accustomed, perfectly familiar things. The years from thirteen on seemed all at once dim, perilous ways to her. If one were made to feel pain and sadness by things which had hitherto given only joy, how could one walk safely through the weeks and months to come?

Feeling a sudden longing for the security of the Wescott kitchen and the very tangible occupation of setting the table, she climbed

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down the boulder and ran all the way home. She did not say anything to her mother about the crab-apple tree; she was beginning, curiously enough, to understand that there are Things that people do not tell, even to mothers. Mrs. Wescott, however, was a wise woman. Although she brought up her children before temperaments were discovered or Child Guidance Clinics and project methods were invented, she knew perfectly well that Mary's age was an Age of Discovery; and when she saw Mary's eyes she gave her an extra dose of sulphur and molasses, and suggested that they spend the afternoon making candy for the church sale.

But when two weeks later the drifting petals and the well-dried roads brought Mary Christmas once more over the hill, and they all ran to meet her with glad shouts, Mary Wescott looked at her with different eyes. For she saw in Mary Christmas what she never could have seen if the crab-apple tree had not finished what the traces of tears had begun.

V

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THAT second visit of Mary Christmas always stood out in the Wescott mind as being particularly satisfying. In the first place, there were no formalities of introduction or of early acquaintance to be undergone. In other words, they could get right down to the business at hand, which was, as everyone must know, the asking of questions concerning that ancient and distant land the charm of which Mary Christmas had upon her first visit only suggested. Moreover, a year had wrought much improvement in Mary Christmas' speech. Now there was little necessity to strain one's ears for familiar words; in fact, there were few words that were unfamiliar. Only the curious rhythm in her voice had not changed, or the deep, rich tones that rose and fell with her changes of mood, or the lingering softness which she gave to especially loved words.

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Nor was she averse to talking. After dinner, while their father interviewed a client in the library and their mother did some left-over household tasks, the children gathered around her in the warm sunlight of the orchard, white and fragrant with its falling blossoms, and asked the questions they had vainly asked one another all winter long.

"Is it really the oldest country in all the world, Mary Christmas — older than the Garden of Eden?"

Mary Christmas looked at them all as though she were trying to bridge the gulf between them and her, between their land and her own. There were time and agony in her eyes. Mary Wescott saw them there, though she did not know their names — wise, brooding, long-suffering things that were more ancient even than Mary Christmas' land.

"Is it really the oldest country in all the world, Mary Christmas — older than the Garden of Eden?"

"It is the Garden of Eden," said Mary Christmas, smiling at the slow surprise that crept over their faces. "God made it the

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first of any land after He had parted the waters. He was tired of looking at just water, and so He made land. That was my land, where Erzerum is now — the Garden of Eden!"

"Where Adam and Eve lived, Mary Christmas? And all the trees in the world?"

"Yes," said Mary Christmas. "Trees white like these by the rivers, and blossoms blowing through the air when the spring comes after the long winter."

"And the Tree of Life, Mary Christmas? Is that in Erzerum, even now?"

"Yes," said Mary Christmas. But her eyes grew dark when she told them that, and she would not describe the Tree of Life.

They were all quiet then for a few moments. The idea of anyone's having lived in the Garden of Eden was quite too staggering. John particularly could not get things straight in his mind. Was Mary Christmas so old that, like the Garden of Eden, she was ageless? She who had seen the Tree of Life, was it not likely that she, too, had walked in the cool of the day with God and Adam and Eve?

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"What's the next oldest thing in your land, Mary Christmas?" It was Roger who asked this question. The Garden of Eden with Mary Christmas in it was too much for him. Like John, he could not get it clear, and he was hoping now for something less overwhelming.

"The next oldest thing?" repeated Mary Christmas, as though all time were passing in slow review before her. "A great mountain is the next oldest thing, the highest mountain in the world, almost, with snow on it all the year. It rises from the plain — so." With her quick, brown fingers she gathered handfuls of the fallen petals and piled them on a flat, bare place near the tree trunk. The children helped her silently by scooping up more petals from among the grass and giving them to her. "So — it goes up from the plain into Heaven, white with snow. It is a holy mountain. It is where Noah landed with the ark, after the rain fell forty days and forty nights."

"I know," said Roger. "Mount Ararat. It's in the Bible."

"It's in the geography, too," said Cynthia.

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"Ararat," repeated Mary Christmas slowly. "Masis, my people call it. Well, Noah landed there after all the rain had fallen. One morning the ark stopped and shook them all. And there they were! The water began to go down — quickly — and there was my land — the oldest land in all the world!"

Again John was puzzled. Mary Christmas and her land were so inseparable that it almost seemed as though she must have been there to show its high pastures and clear waters to Shem, Ham, and Japheth, while Noah's wife tidied up the ark before leaving it, and Noah anxiously loosed the beasts, clean and unclean alike, determined that this time there should be no hitch in the starting of a new world.

"What became of the ark?" asked Roger. He had a detail-loving mind. "The Bible does n't say."

Mary Christmas looked at them all without replying. Perhaps she hesitated to supplement the Bible; perhaps she was preparing them for the effect of her answer.

"The ark is still there on the top of the

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mountain." She spoke slowly and solemnly. "God keeps it there to make the people good. No one can see it, but it is there. When the moon shines on the mountain or the sun on certain days, there is its great shadow."

"Oh, but, Mary Christmas! Still there, after all those thousands of years?"

"I tell you the truth," said Mary Christmas. There was finality in her tone. "There is its shadow on the mountain-side."

"Have you seen its shadow, Mary Christmas — you — yourself?"

"Yes," said Mary Christmas. And then she did a strange thing. Raising her right hand to her head, she touched her forehead lightly with her fingers, then her breast, and then her shoulders from left to right, closing her eyes as she did so. Her still face awed the children. They had never seen that sign before.

"But what if anyone should climb the mountain to its very top?" they persisted, breaking the silence once she had opened her eyes. "Could n't they see it if it is there?"

"No," said Mary Christmas. "Only some-

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one holy could see it — someone very, very good. The Virgin Mary — or, perhaps, your father.”

Years afterward they were to laugh at the remembrance of Mary Christmas’ words and at the picture of Father Wescott toiling up Ararat with all the zeal which he had ever shown on the eve of a Republican victory. But now they were impressed only by the reverence in her voice. Good and wise as they had always known their father to be, they had never thought him fit for such celestial company.

“Once a saint, a holy man, tried to climb the mountain to see the ark,” continued Mary Christmas. “That was hundreds of years ago. His name was Saint Jacob. For three days he went up and up through the snow and ice. But each morning, when he woke from sleep, he found himself back at the same place where he had started the day before. Then an angel came to him with a great plank of wood. The angel told Saint Jacob that God would let no one walk on the top of the mountain, for it was sacred; but that He had sent the saint a piece of

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the ark as a reward for his patience. And now that wood is in the great church at Etchmiadzin."

"Say it again, Mary Christmas," they begged, forgetting Saint Jacob and the ark in this unfamiliar, ringing word. "Say it again — *please!*"

She repeated it, and they said it after her, against those days when they should retell her stories to one another and to all their friends.

"Have you seen the wood yourself, Mary Christmas, in the great church?"

"I have touched it with my hand," said Mary Christmas, again pausing a moment to make that mysterious sign on forehead and breast. "Once, when I was a little girl like Mary and Cynthia, I was ill. I could not walk or play. My father took me to Etchmiadzin — a long journey in a donkey-cart. I remember how tired I got and how my bones ached. When we came to Etchmiadzin, we went straight to the great church inside the high walls. It was dark, with lights only at the great altar, and sweet smells everywhere. The priest there told

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me to place my hand on the wood. Then he made a prayer, and I was well again. On the way back home I sprang from the cart and ran ahead of the donkey. My father — he cried for joy!”

Mary and Cynthia looked at Mary Christmas' hand, which lay in her lap, motionless for a moment, as she noted the effect of her story upon them. That long-fingered hand which was strained and knotted and bruised from the weight of her great bundle, which had yearned to hold an avenging weapon and to shed blood, which had woven birds and stars, tired sheep and climbing roses into their mother's shawl — that hand had, years ago, touched a piece of the ark of Noah, and had felt within itself the quickening sense of returning health. The thought was too immense and far-reaching for them. They needed weeks and months to be able to comprehend it.

“In the church at Etchmiadzin there are other holy, sacred things,” continued Mary Christmas, her voice lingering over her words. “There is the head of the spear which the soldiers put into the side of our Lord. Then

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in a great silver box there is the hand of holy Saint Gregory. He was the saint who lived down a well for thirteen years."

"For thirteen years!" cried Roger, disbelief punctuating his words. "In a well! Oh, Mary Christmas!"

"He did," said Mary Christmas. "I tell you the truth just as they told it to me when I was a little girl. A wicked king cast him into the well because he would not give up his faith. And there he stayed, holding tight to the rocks so that he might not slip into the black, terrible water. There were serpents in that water. They reached their heads toward him! But when he made the sign of the cross they slipped back again. It was the same with all the other creeping things. They fled before that holy sign!"

"What did he eat all those years, Mary Christmas?"

"A widow woman who lived near the well lowered food to him in a basket every night at midnight. One night the king's soldiers caught her. They would have put her to death if holy Gregory had not heard her cries and called from his well. They heard

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him call and mocked him. Then God sent an angel from Heaven who changed them all, and the king too, into wild boars, and threw a veil over the woman so that they could not find her.

“Then, when God knew that Gregory was good and patient enough to be a saint, He sent another angel to the wicked king’s sister, and commanded her to bring Gregory up out of the well. And when they lowered cords and drew the saint up, he was black like a man from Africa! The first thing he did was to put his hands on the horns of the boar who had been the king. The horns faded away, and the king came back. And Gregory said, ‘I am building a church for God in Etchmiadzin. Will you give gold and jewels?’ And the king said, ‘Yes.’”

“And the great silver box, Mary Christmas? What about that?”

Then Mary Christmas told them that when Saint Gregory died they cut off his right hand, which had wrought such wonders, and placed it in a silver box in the great church. The hand still wrought wonders, for when sick and suffering people and those who were

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troubled with care and sin came to Etchmiadzin and knelt and touched the box, they were healed. Then, she said, there was a certain good bishop who was much worried in his mind over an old sin in his boyhood — a sin which most persons would have forgotten. But he could not forget it. All his life he had wanted to atone for it in some more satisfactory way than just by holy living. When he saw the miracles wrought by the hand of the saint, he thought of the most satisfactory way in all the world.

One night, when all was still within the high walls of the cathedral square in Etchmiadzin, he laid aside his bishop's robes and put on the gray gown and hood of a pilgrim. He went to the dark church with its dim altar lights, and took the silver box, which he wrapped in purple velvet and bound with cords of gold. Kneeling by the altar in the stillness, he consecrated himself to purity of thought and act and, with the aid of holy Saint Gregory, to the service of God among those who most needed Him.

He did not know just where he was going, Mary Christmas told them; but once he was

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outside the wall, some Power led him where It would. It took him far beyond cities and towns to high, wind-swept plains, where rough men wandered with their flocks and herds, and to secluded mountain villages whose people knew nothing of Etchmiadzin and its great church, and had never heard of the good saint. Among these people and in these villages the pilgrim lingered, and wherever he saw sorrow or sickness, he would take the silver box with its rich covering of purple and gold from beneath his shabby cloak and show it to those who needed help. Here the power of the saint was greater even than at Etchmiadzin, for those in suffering or anxiety needed but to look upon the box, and they were straightway healed.

Most wonderful of all, the saint gave his miraculous help not only to people but to animals and flowers. For once when the tired pilgrim rested on the top of a high, silent hill and sang a psalm to God, he chanced to see a lamb that had fallen and was caught between two rocks. Carefully placing the silver box on the hillside, he hurried to help the poor creature. But as he drew near, he saw

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to his amazement the rocks that held the lamb separate, and the animal spring to its feet and frisk away.

“And an old man told me once,” concluded Mary Christmas, looking at the rapt faces of the children, “what *he* heard about the hand of holy Saint Gregory. He said that flowers and trees which wanted water in the hot summer would spring up afresh when the silver box was brought among them. So that wherever the pilgrim went, the valleys and hills blossomed and there was peace everywhere — just as on Ascension eve.”

“What’s Ascension eve, Mary Christmas?”

Mary Christmas looked at them in perplexed surprise, and then at the church spire, just visible through the blossoming trees. Evidently she was doubtful as to the sufficiency of New England Congregationalism in the nineties.

“It is the eve of the day when our Lord ascended into Heaven,” she said slowly. “On that night, in my country, at one moment which no one knows, all the water everywhere is still. Rivers and streams do not move. In that moment stones and flowers

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and stars and all creatures speak to one another. If you should hide in a cave in the mountain and hear them, you would never feel sadness any more."

The tense softness of her voice as she said those last words mingled with the hum of bees in the quiet orchard. The children were silent as they looked at her, even the boys vaguely conscious that this was no time to speak. She leaned back against the gray trunk of the apple tree, her body relaxed, her quick hands listless in her lap, her mouth still and thoughtful. Only her eyes under their dark brows were not still. They were as though haunted by living flames that soared upward from the fire in her heart. Mary Wescott saw them burning there, and understood all at once that Beauty had kindled them — the irresistible, torturing loveliness that lies in ancient, lip-worn tales, consecrated forever by their own mystic grace and by the simple faith of a people's childhood.

In mid-afternoon, when their mother called Mary Christmas to a lunch of sandwiches and milk before she should again take to the

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road with her great pack, the children followed her to the house, fairly dazed by all the unfamiliar things which they had heard. When she had gone, they would sort out all these bewildering events and persons and places and put them in orderly, well-kept mental niches, to be taken out and reviewed one at a time: the Garden of Eden with its Tree of Life; the ark and its one transcendent plank; Saints Jacob and Gregory; the penitent pilgrim with his silver box; Armenian hills and valleys in the single magic moment of Ascension eve. But now, overpowered by the wealth to which they had become the heirs, they could only stand and watch her as she ate her lunch and talked with their father and mother about the roads she would travel during the next few days and her prospects for the summer.

When, intent upon reaching a near-by town before the late June twilight should fade, she had gone upon her way in the lengthening afternoon shadows, and the children retold her stories to their father and mother, Mary Wescott, impelled by the desire to be alone, left them on the porch and

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hurried through the pasture to the boulder. Once she had climbed to the top and looked again at the crab-apple tree, now white with drifting bloom, the lump in her throat got the better of her and her eyes filled with tears. But no one can be quite sure that the crab-apple tree was the cause. It might have been the sad, haunting beauty of certain words of Mary Christmas, or the thought of one star calling to another across a wide Eastern sky.

The next day it rained. An east wind swept the last petals from the orchard trees, and drove them through the misty air into the drenching grass. Cynthia, returning in the rain from an errand for her mother, brought in one which clung close to her wet, pink cheek. Watching the storm from the library windows, they talked of Mary Christmas. What was she thinking of as she followed the coast road beneath the lowering rain-filled clouds? Was it of Saint Gregory, or the great, dim church where she had been healed, or of Raphael and little Mary in Erzerum? There was one place which they

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knew where the highroad ran just above the ocean, where on clear days one could see the Mount Desert hills lying like a sleeping giant against the blue horizon. Here, on days like this, the surf, driven by the wind, pounded at the foot of fog-wrapped cliffs; here, they felt sure, she would wish for Ascension eve when for one moment the waters are still.

VI

A GOOD SAINT AND A SILVER BOX

IN late September, when a blue haze veiled the hills beyond the harbor and so lay over the upland farms that one who did not know might easily think the land was kind, when woodbine flamed upon the stone walls and the still air sang with a hidden insect-chorus, Mary Christmas surprised and delighted them all by coming again. Her visit this time was brief, — she was on the trail of a rumor that some late summer-sojourners wanted laces, — but she stayed long enough to strengthen their faith in the stories of the miraculous relics at Etchmiadzin, and to convince them anew that she had become, in truth, the most wonderful person in all their world. Nor were they obliged to content themselves during that winter merely with conjectures as to what she was doing and with the tracings of her spring journeyings upon the map. Their father, returning from

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Augusta during the legislative season for a week-end at home, told them of meeting her one day on the city street, and of his embarrassment when, in the face of all the passers-by, she threw herself at his feet in the newly fallen snow quite as she had done on the library floor. She had, he said, — the country roads being impassable, — begun to ply a winter trade in handmade and imported articles among the larger towns along the railroad, and was already becoming, so his city friends told him, a familiar figure. Once again he saw her, this time in a coach of the train from Portland to Boston, whence he was traveling, much to the satisfaction of his family, to deliver a speech on Republican integrity before the McKinley Club of that city. Here again, prostrating herself as completely as the train aisle would permit, she hailed him as her savior, much to the amazement of the pop-corn boy, the conductor, and all the tired, self-centred persons who usually travel on trains.

The tidings bridged the long succession of cold and snow-blocked weeks which had kept her from them the year before, and brought

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her nearer. Moreover, in the games and plays which they had formed from her stories, her presence among them became almost tangible. Every child in the village knew those stories, which the Wescotts had retold with such generosity of detail and with no slight degree of superiority; and there was not one who would willingly refuse his services when a well was to be dug for Saint Gregory in the deepest snowdrift, or when a suitable plank must be procured for presentation to Saint Jacob, who patiently slumbered at the foot of some improvised Ararat.

Here were pastimes of which they never tired, pageants which the State of Maine in the late nineteenth or in any other century could not afford them. Here, as they ransacked their various attics for costumes, trained the dogs of the neighborhood to take the part of wild boars, instructed Saint Gregory in the art of crossing himself, and converted the Wescott stable into the Etchmiadzin church, they felt the lure of "stronds afar remote," recognized, even if vaguely, the charm that forever lies in unfamiliar, echo-

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ing names of distant places, and dimly perceived a spiritual magic and romance that transcended religion as they knew it, as sunlight transforms a dull and barren room.

There was, it must be admitted, not a little honest doubt on the part of parents, both as to the advisability of these plays and games and as to the character and influence of this stranger within their gates who had inspired them. Were stories that dealt with saints and relics and a church with an altar suitable to the needs of a strictly Protestant community? Was there not sacrilege, or worse still, mockery, in this sign of the cross which every child who had at any time played the part of Saint Gregory could make with avidity? Was it not possible that such practices, even in play, might tend to entice children from that straight, narrow, and rather unembellished way which their fathers had so steadfastly and unquestioningly trod?

These queries, however, if not answered satisfactorily, were at least stilled by a kind of mutual confidence and dependence common to New England village life in the nineties — a dependence which afforded inesti-

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mable advantages both to the individual and to society. Pleading children of this period most commonly received from their parents one of the following replies: —

“If the Wescott children do, you may.”

“If Mrs. Howe lets Lucy and William, I’ll let you.”

“Wait and see if the Parker children go.”

That the stories and games told and inspired by Mary Christmas were not considered harmful by the Wescott parents was sufficient reason for their toleration, if not for their sanction, by other heads of families. As for Mary Christmas herself, the initial suspicion which her sudden and outlandish appearance had bred among them had died an early death. The reception and confidence accorded her by the Wescotts, her tragic story, which appealed especially to those fired by foreign missionary zeal, and above all the good reports of her conduct on the road, of her honesty, industry, and kindness to children, which were circulated freely by those having relatives in the more open country, all bore witness to her worthiness as an occasional companion.

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So the children played on undisturbed. While the snow covered the fields, they enacted Saint Jacob, his toiling, unsuccessful ascent of Ararat, and the visit from the plank-bearing angel; and in the first thaw they used the moist, easily packed snow for the construction of Saint Gregory's well, the home of the kind widow, and a rather diminutive palace of the wicked king. In the summer, reënforced by all the children within a wide radius, they ran screaming through the open fields, now as hordes of barbarians, devastating the land of Mary Christmas, now as bloodthirsty Turks, bent on massacre. But the acknowledged favorite was the story of the journey of Mary Christmas, sick, in the donkey-cart to Etchmiadzin and of her healing in the great church. This they played again and again with William Howe's big Newfoundland as the donkey, Cynthia and Mary alternately as the sick child and her anxious mother, Roger as the priest in the church, and William himself, on account of his necessary provision for the journey, as the joyous father. When John looked wistful at having no part, they made him the

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little brother, who with the mother welcomed his sister's glad return home, under the old tamarack tree at the bottom of the field.

Curiously enough, perhaps, they did not play the penitent pilgrim, though it would seem that his triumphant journey with Saint Gregory's hand beneath his cloak might have afforded the best sort of dramatic material. Whether it lacked for them a certain concrete vividness which the other stories held, or whether, actuated by some strange, instinctive reserve, not unknown to childhood, they forbore to portray in visible form the many miraculous deeds wrought by the hand of the saint, one will never know; but the older members of the company never proposed its performance, and its stirring details were kept alive among them only by oral tradition.

And yet, although the players, as a whole, never presented the journeyings of the good bishop, the story was enacted by one of their number, who, going alone after the manner of the pilgrim himself, wrought his holy deeds in the silence of the snow-covered woods and pastures. That one was Cynthia Wescott. Since Mary Christmas had first

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told her stories, she had held this one as the tale of tales; and as the months in their quick succession left her longer and more awkward in arms and legs and more wondering and wistful in heart, its loveliness haunted her until it hurt by its very grace and beauty.

Cynthia, it will be readily perceived, was growing up. No blossom-laden tree had flashed suddenly upon her inward vision, — Fate, perhaps, had been kinder to her sister, — but certain disturbing questions and indistinct, reluctant perceptions had gleamed for a moment across her ready imagination, and then had faded away before she could see them clearly. They were the growing pains of her mind, though she did not know that. One day she felt the weight of coming years; the next the ecstasy of their hidden secrets. Into her life, she would have said could she have found words to describe it, there had crept a kind of rhythm, now quick and joyous with melody, now slow and sad in its cadences. It was all quite unexplainable, and at times most bewildering. And when on Christmas eve at the concert in the church she discovered all at once that

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John, reciting a piece, in a velvet suit, skillfully fashioned from the discarded parlor lambrequin, was something to cry over instead of to smile at as the others were doing, as *she* had always done before, she understood that the clear, orderly days of her little girlhood had gone away. Nor could she then know that they would return to her after many years, clear, orderly, luminous, their certain rhythms in harmonious accord.

Thus it happened that on a clear February morning, while the others were coasting down the long hill, Cynthia played the part of the pilgrim. Clad in red hood and mittens and in her red coat with its long cape, which so effectually hid the necessary box with its supernatural powers, she hurried to the stable and through its big, yawning doors into the snow-covered fields which led almost directly to the woods and high pastures. The crust of the snow was hard enough to bear her weight, and she hurried on until she was beyond the reach of the eyes and ears of those in the immediate neighborhood. Once within the shadow of the trees, she stood beneath a great pine, almost shamefaced

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over her yielding to the desire to come on such an errand. But the stillness of the woods, broken only by the occasional cry of a bluejay or the swish of pine boughs in the wind, reassured her in her purpose, and she began the journey of the pilgrim with his silver box.

As she grew older, she always held among the confused and crowded impressions of her childhood the clearest memory of that winter day; of the bright silence of the woods, and of herself going softly through the trees, across a frozen swamp with the brown marsh grass protruding above its smooth, white hummocks, over wide stretches of pasture, and stopping here and there to draw from beneath her red cape the wonder-working box and to present it before the suffering eyes of some stricken animal or tired wayfarer. She heard, too, as the years came and went, the sound of her own childish voice, clear and high in the still air, reciting the words with which Mary Christmas' mellowed, ringing tones had endowed the pilgrim and which she supplemented by others of her own: —

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“‘Art thou ill, my brother? Look upon the hand of the holy Saint Gregory, which the Lord hath sent unto thee.’”

“‘Death, flee away from this poor creature, in the blessed name of Saint Gregory and of the Lord of Hosts!’”

It was from that day, she knew, that the love of words came to suffuse her life with its radiance, tuning her ears to cadences of sound, charming her eyes with the ecstasy of light and color, delighting her imagination by opening gates into far fields. Had the lips of countless thousands in their age-long life endowed them with music? Had the visions, evoked by them centuries ago, lingered within their syllables?

From that day as the penitent pilgrim in the still, white wood she became a worshipper at their shrine, repeating to herself again and again the sentences and phrases which Mary Christmas had first endeared to her and which had stayed to take up their own places in her heart: —

“‘The Lord be merciful unto thee.’”

“‘In the blessed name of Saint Gregory and of the Lord of Hosts.’”

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Single words, too, began to hold a charm for her, words quite free from their context, but never alone because of the pictures they called forth. *Silent, holy, high, garden, old* — what magic lay within each one of them!

Old was, perhaps, her first love and kept its place in spite of many contending rivals. Mary Christmas loved *old*. Upon her lips it opened the gates of ancient cities, led one over desolate, hoary plains and hot, sand-swept deserts, carried one to remote gardens within gray, crumbling walls, brought before one's eyes a time-worn, weary land. Cynthia came to cherish those three letters as one cherishes a rare jewel which in changing lights gives forth changing colors. In fact, she grew so ardent in her love for them that she felt personally aggrieved when John at the breakfast table, his father being absent, cried in a sudden declaration of independence: —

“I hate this nasty old porridge! I won't eat it!”

VII

A PILLAR OF FIRE

THE opening years of the new century found Mary and Cynthia within the white-columned academy and in daily verbal conflict with Orgetorix, chief of the Helvetians, Catiline, and the Ten Thousand Greeks with their interminable parasangs; Roger mightily concerned with "Thanatopsis" and cube root; and John under the initial spell of the burial of De Soto in the dark Mississippi. They found Mrs. Wescott still true to sulphur and molasses, blue serge, and a nine o'clock bedtime, and Mr. Wescott still a victim during the summer months of that distressing habit already fully described, and an all-the-year supporter of the party which had brought forth a Lincoln and inspired a McKinley — the party whose bedrock principles of conservatism and integrity must safely weather its present rather drastic and

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impulsive leadership. And they found Mary Christmas still a traveler of the coast roads from the drifting of apple blossoms in early June to the falling of the leaves in late October.

Nor had those years wrought many changes in Mary Christmas. Except for some white threads in her dark hair and the deepening of certain lines about her nose and mouth, she was outwardly as she had been on that memorable first visit. She still wore the gold coins in her ears and the red silk handkerchief, shifted her black bundle from one hip to the other with surprising agility, and persisted in falling upon her face at the initial approach of Mr. Wescott. She was still an inexhaustible treasure-house of stories, each year adding others to those first and best beloved, of the ark and Ararat, of the ancient saints and the pilgrim, and of that holy city, Etchmiadzin. Her eyes under their dark brows had not lost their restlessness. Now they burned with anguish over the sufferings of her land, now glowed with the sad loveliness of the tales which she told, now gleamed with ominous revenge at the hated name of

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Turk, which, although the children were forbidden to use it in her presence, occasionally found its way to her ears. Falling petals and the drying of the country roads still were heralds of her coming; indeed, those early days in June when orchard blossoms drifted through the bright air had come to be known in the Wescott family and among the other children of the village as Mary Christmas days.

And yet the opening years of that new century found Mary Christmas in ways of pleasantness which the late nineties had been reluctant to promise her. Indeed, she might well have cried with the Psalmist, perchance of her own hill pastures: "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." Slowly but steadily she had built up a reputation for herself among a people by nature skeptical of the "foreigner," and in districts far from Utopian for peddlers of all sorts. Although she had in no small measure the shrewdness of her race, all suspicion of dishonesty, rife upon her early appearance, had been dispelled by an openness in her business dealings, almost

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childlike in its simplicity. Attendant upon this was a ready understanding of the whims and prejudices of her customers, a happy faculty which forbade the tenacity of the average seller, but was quick to suggest a substitute for whatever was refused. Aiding these assets to good business and yet transcending them all was her larger, more bountiful self, which, once met with on the common way, was never to be forgotten, and which now, as then, beggars all attempts at description.

She manifested, even to dull people, an almost overwhelming prodigality of nature. Her energy was tireless and apparently incapable of consumption. It carried her over miles of country, sometimes in a drenching rain, and left her at nightfall at the back door of some upland farm, whose unwilling inhabitants grudgingly offered her the hayloft as a bedchamber and in an hour were taking down the newspapers from the windows of the spare room. It lent a buoyancy to her tired feet when during her first months as a traveler she had left the main road for an outlying house, only to be turned away at

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the gate. It prompted her in long stretches of woodland to sing the folk songs of her people — songs of Vartan, who saved Armenia from the worship of fire, and of the Virgin, on whose festival the ripening grapes are blessed by a holy cross. It made her never too tired to talk or to play with children. In its gracious strength she dreamed dreams and saw visions: dreams of the day when she should bring her children to this kind, new land; visions of herself, behind a red pushcart with stout, well-oiled wheels, convenient apartments for small accessories, and a thick rubber cover, protective against bad weather. Who shall say that it sprang from a superabundance of physical well-being alone? Surely such power breathed of the spiritual, and suggested the generosity of God on the day of her creation.

Thus it happened that after five summers in the country and five winters in the towns the dream of dreams came true, and Raphael Christmas and his sister Mary arrived from Erzerum. What excitement there was in the Wescott family and in the Wescott village, when on a Mary Christmas day, just five

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years from the first, this great announcement was proudly made under the apple trees! Even Mary and Cynthia, with their braids turned under and college only two years away, were thrilled to their finger-tips, and John and Roger refused to let Mary Christmas go on her way until she had promised to bring Raphael with her the following spring.

But Raphael Christmas, it must be confessed, was a sore disappointment. When, the news of his mother's approach having been brought to them by the doctor in his carriage, they ran to meet her up the hill, and saw a tall, awkward boy in clothes like their own, they were all conscious of a sinking feeling within themselves. No imagination, even of the most leaping and vivid variety, could see in this overgrown lad, who shifted uneasily from one side of the road to the other, threw stones at sparrows, and was impolite to his mother, one who had lived in the Garden of Eden and had looked upon Mount Ararat with its light-touched shadow of the ark. Not the most friendly feeling in the world could transform

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his dark, thin face, with its shrewd black eyes and its total lack of all those qualities which made his mother's beautiful, into the welcome one of a valued, if infrequent, companion.

Swift Americanization, a process at that time relatively unhampered by theories, had left its marks on Raphael Christmas. A year at school in Portland had taught him many things. Among the most outstanding of these were an astounding command of American slang of a range and versatility known to few natives, the art of chewing gum noisily and continuously, and the most rampant desire to lose as soon as possible all traces of his foreign birth. This longing prompted him to an almost continual nagging of his mother. Her red silk handkerchief, the gold coins in her ears, and her gold-laced bodice annoyed him. His playfellows in Portland laughed at them and taunted him. Whenever his quick eyes saw money pass into her hands from the sale of anything, he began his questions.

"There's money, Ma! For a dress, ain't it — a real dress, and a hat? Yes?"

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"There's money! You buy a hat now, and take out the coins?"

He had grown quickly to dislike all references to Armenia, and only tolerated his mother's fervent hopes that he might some day avenge his father's death, because he liked the picture of himself, knife-armed, and giving blood for blood.

All these things the Wescotts gathered for themselves on that sixth Mary Christmas day — gathered with a ready sympathy for Mary Christmas that helped to quell their own disillusionment. Mary and Cynthia, escaping to their own room after dinner while their father and mother talked with their guest and while John and Roger introduced Raphael more or less apologetically to the baseball team, confided to each other their only remaining hope, that Mary Christmas could not, for the blinding glory of her dreams, see in Raphael what they saw. What might happen, they wondered, if she did see in one quick, all-illuminating flash or in a hundred more slow, more cruel perceptions the unloveliness in him, so apparent to them all! Then the light that went before

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her like a pillar of fire, that made her forgetful of tired feet, that impelled her to sing songs and to tell stories to children — might it not vanish into unutterable darkness?

But Fate was kind to Mary Christmas and reassuring to Mary and Cynthia. Surely no all-illuminating flash revealed Raphael to his mother, and, if the perceptions came, they were slow and far less cruel than they might have been. To her, Raphael, in spite of his derision of their country, his shiftiness, his nagging, and his gum, was heir to the wealth of ages and, in some mysterious way which would later be revealed to them, the certain avenger of his father's cruel death. She did concede, it is true, to his nagging, and, to the Wescott mind, in a deplorable measure; for in the spring following his visit she appeared in a rusty green suit, many sizes too large for her, and in a red, daisy-trimmed hat, which she wore so insecurely pinned to her dark hair that it sat upon one ear in a most rakish manner. But the gold coins she never relinquished.

That year, too, the vision of the pushcart became a reality. It was red, with the stout,

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well-oiled wheels of which she had dreamed; it boasted the protective rubber covering, which on fair days folded neatly under its shining body; it had compartments of all sizes with hinged covers, and, for those which carried the most valuable of her wares, padlocks with tiny keys. Her pride in it and her repeated assurances that the labor of her journey was now depleted by half atoned in some degree for the loss of the gold-laced bodice and for the advent of the red hat.

It was on this visit that they noted the deepening lines around her nose and mouth, and a perceptible, if slight, dulling of her eyes that had so burned and glowed through all the years they had known her.

"You're tired, Mary Christmas," said Father Wescott. "Stay at home this winter and let the town trade go."

And John, drawing his mother into the pantry on the pretext of an afternoon lunch, confessed, in a burst of anxious confidence, that he, for one, was worried.

But Mary Christmas laughed at them as she adjusted her new hat, which immediately became unadjusted when she stooped to lift

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the handle of the pushcart. She must work winter and summer, she said; it cost a lot to keep a family of three in a real house. There was pride in her voice, however, when she told John, who pushed the cart up the hill for her, how Raphael was now standing on the street corners and selling papers in shrill calls like a real American boy, and how deftly and quickly the fingers of little Mary went in and out of the frames that held the laces.

VIII

SHOWERS OF GOLD AND PEARLS

THUS it came about in Wescott history that those bright years of childhood when things were things and those troubled later years when the same things could not be bounded by their own neat selves became a kind of tapestry shot through and through with colored threads. Blue, purple, red, gold, and silver, they deepened and glowed — the colors of music and poetry, of magical words and ancient tales, of romance and high endeavor, of distant places and strange peoples, of sacrifice and holiness. Into the texture of their lives Mary Christmas had woven those threads in hues that were fadeless against time and circumstance.

Not that the four Wescotts interpreted their love for Mary Christmas or their debt to her in terms of colored threads in tapestry. That was to come later. They only knew that for years she had added to their lives a

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vividness and a completeness which had not been there before she came. They knew, too, that she had entwined herself inextricably within the fabric of their existence because of her connection with certain occurrences, which, it is quite safe to say, seemed at the time of their happening of more tremendous import than all the quiet hours beneath the orchard trees.

They early learned that she was a safe repository for secrets and a valued counselor in times of storm and stress; and although her visits were confined to that anticipated one of early June and an occasional second in October, which they could never entirely depend upon, they found her more than once the one thing needful. Indeed, Roger and John, with other of their associates, never forgot her sudden and unlooked-for appearance and the quick relief it engendered on a certain Saturday morning of September in Roger's thirteenth year. They were gathered in disheartened council on Mary Wescott's boulder, in a final and desperate effort to discover some means of averting from themselves the just deserts of a for-

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bidden line of conduct, which, in this case, had to do with some pear trees, an angry farmer, stones, and broken windows. Retribution seemed inevitable. They were silently picturing the chastened glances which they would exchange at church the next morning in an attempt to discover whose fate had been most unendurable, when around a bend in the path at the foot of the boulder came Mary Christmas, taking her favorite short cut through the pasture. Surely here was visible proof of a beneficent Providence, who was not deaf to frenzied prayers, and who caused His rain to fall alike upon the just and upon the unjust!

It was no easy matter to disclose all the miserable details of the affair to Mary Christmas, whose piercing black eyes sought out every jot and tittle of the truth; but hope, so long deferred, spurred them on, and they spared themselves nothing, secure at least in the knowledge that a general confession to her was, when compared with acknowledgment made alone and unaided before grieved and disillusioned parents, of two evils most certainly the lesser. They needed five dollars,

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they told her, after their consciences were, for the time being, freed — just five hundred times the amount which Roger had unearthed from his pockets, and which was the sole wealth among them. They named the sum with hesitation; it was appallingly large in those days; but it was the necessary aggregate which must be extorted from them by sundown if their parents were to remain in ignorance.

“I see,” said Mary Christmas, once the miserable tale was told, her stern, sharp eyes scrutinizing each guilty face. “I see.” Surely the first person singular, present indicative of that simple verb had never before been burdened with such weighty disapproval!

Then she produced the five dollars, which was wrapped with other bills, quite bewildering to the boys, in folds of white cloth and hidden deep within her gold-laced bodice; but she did not give it to them until she had exacted from each a twofold promise of upright living in the future and of reimbursement from their own earnings in the spring. Sitting at the foot of the boulder in the middle of their circle, she made a swift reckoning

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of the amount due her from each boy, which amounts she wrote on slips of paper, a separate slip for the pocket of each blouse. Only to John she gave none, considering him more sinned against than sinning, and warning them all against leading those younger than themselves into wrongdoing. Him she kept with her, reluctant as he was for once to stay, while she sent the others, in whose breasts relief was fast conquering repentance, on a two-mile journey through the woods to apologize to the farmer and to pay their just indebtedness.

Be it said to her credit that she collected the five dollars, even to the uttermost farthing. It was returned to her the following spring, as she had demanded, by boys who approached her singly from every conceivable hiding-place along the road and proffered hard-earned coins in bits of dirty paper. Be it said, too, that two months after the incident by the boulder, her own conscience troubling her by the thought that she might have wronged him who had been for so long her friend, she wrote a full account of it to Mr. Wescott, confessing freely her part as

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protector, but asking that, if possible, the children be not punished. Mr. Wescott smiled over Mary Christmas' letter, which he shared with Mrs. Wescott in the seclusion of the library. It lacked the ease and growing accuracy of her speech, and was, in parts, with its self-abasement and anxious queries, inexpressibly funny. Then, because he was conservative in parenthood as well as in politics, he said not a word to John and Roger, though he did contrive that winter to put in the way of his older son more than the usual opportunities for earning an honest penny.

There were other affairs of far less serious nature in which Mary Christmas played the part of a confidante and friend, not to the Wescotts alone but to many other children in their village and in other villages along the coast of Maine. So many in fact were there that these pages cannot attempt to chronicle them; but one other they must relate because of its immediate importance to at least one of the Wescotts, and its later tremendous significance to the family at large.

That year in the life of Mary Christmas

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which so stupendously marked the advent of the pushcart and the red hat marked in the lives of Mary and Cynthia Wescott their graduation from the academy. Orgetorix, chief of the Helvetians, and the wholly infamous Catiline had given place to Æneas, his aged father Anchises, and his little son Ascanius, and Cyrus the Younger with his ten thousand Greeks had marched both up and down, moving on at last to make way for Achilles, sulking in his tent. Reciting their carefully prepared essays in the church to the village at large, the one on "Clara Barton, Her Life and Work," the other a clarion call to achievement, entitled "*Trans Alpes Italia Est*," they were not in the least unaware that their white graduation frocks eclipsed all the others by reason of the yards of lace which embraced their shoulders in a kind of berth, and which from waist to hem encircled their wide skirts. Mary Christmas, with the help of little Mary, had woven that lace through the long winter evenings in Portland, and had sent it as a forerunner of her own arrival. When she came, pushing the red cart down the hill, and again drawing

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the anxious attention of the Wescotts by the deepening lines in her face, the graduation was a thing of the past, and the hearts of Mary and Cynthia were beating excitedly at the thought of college in the fall.

But it was not only the thought of college which was quickening the heart of Mary Wescott in those early days of her nineteenth year; and this Mary Christmas discovered on the late afternoon of the day when she said good-bye to John and set forth along the familiar road. Reaching the bars which heretofore had given her access to the short cut through the pasture, she stopped, realizing for the second time that day that a push-cart has its disadvantages. But desiring a drink from the spring that bubbled up at the foot of the boulder, and a glimpse of the freshness of the woods before she must again take to the dusty highway, she drew the red cart to the side of the road, carefully lifted her new skirt to escape the roughness of the gray fence-poles, and crawled between the bars. A few steps through the alders and over the moist green hummocks, starred here and there with the blue of violets, and she

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emerged into the path that led to the boulder and the spring.

She did not drink from the spring, however, thirsty though she was, nor was she conscious of the freshness of the woods with their sun-flecked shadows; for there on the boulder above her, and facing the vista that afforded a sight of the crab-apple tree, sat Mary Wescott with her bright head resting against the dark shoulder of William Howe — the selfsame William who had once played the part of Mary's father in the Etchmiadzin miracle, and who had but just returned triumphant after a year with the Alma Mater of Mr. Longfellow and Father Wescott.

Mary Christmas leaned against the great rock in sheer surprise. The realization that Mary Wescott was a little girl no longer was in itself a shock; and this outward and visible sign that a new door in life had suddenly swung wide for her was quite too overwhelming. Entirely unprepared for both, Mary Christmas stood still and vaguely discerned as through a mist what the two on the rock saw with such intensity — the white tree with its full-blown, drifting blossoms. She

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did not hear their whispered confidences, did not know that Mary Wescott was finding it the easiest and most satisfying thing in the world to tell William how the crab-apple tree had made her feel and to receive from him the perfect assurance that he had felt exactly the same way! She was concerned solely, once she had come to herself, with the question of whether she could reach the shelter of the alders without attracting their notice. Then William bent his head toward Mary, for he was all at once seized with the most absurd idea that there were secrets in the corners of her mouth; but in that instant, instead of assuring himself that he was right, he caught sight of Mary Christmas' red hat. For that hat had been designed to arrest, even at such a moment as this, the most wandering attention.

It is, perhaps, just as well not to describe all that followed — the confusion, the embarrassment, the confession, the explanations, the pleas for secrecy. It is quite enough to say that William, standing with his arm around Mary in the shadow of the great boulder, led the conversation, as was entirely

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fitting and proper, and that Mary Christmas, in spite of earlier misgivings, the result no doubt of surprise, felt her heart warm toward him as he professed his intentions the most honorable in the world and maintained his decision to interview Father Wescott as a gentleman should, just as soon as another year of college should have added dignity and certainty to their dream. Mary Wescott, on her part, cried a little, as I believe girls did on similar occasions a quarter of a century ago, absurd as it doubtless was; and then as the lengthening shadows foretold the evening light, Mary Christmas gave her promise and her blessing. They all went back to the pushcart together, where Mary Wescott straightened the red hat and perked up the daisies. It was all in vain, however; for when Mary Christmas again started on her way, the hat lurched in such reckless abandon that Mary and William both wished the daisies had been allowed to retain their former modest expression.

That evening, as she journeyed along the cool, fragrant roads, Mary Christmas sang, not now the songs of Vartan or of the Vir-

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gin's festival, but one of wedded love. How clearly the unfamiliar, musical words rose and fell in the still air, accompanied by the monotonous undertone of the pushcart:—

“It rained showers of gold when Artasches
became a bridegroom;
It rained pearls when Satenik became a bride.”

IX

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THAT fall Mary and Cynthia went to college. The preparation for this event of events had been almost more overwhelming than the journey itself and those first overcrowded, uncomfortable days away from home. In extent and quality their new wardrobes were in themselves unbelievable. A half dozen times a day they experienced entirely unaccustomed thrills as they raised the lids of their new trunks and gazed upon outfits in which blue gingham and serge did not predominate. Their graduation frocks with Mary Christmas' lace were, of course, their best dresses, to be reserved for the gayest of parties; but there was a sprigged muslin apiece for second best and — wonder of wonders! — silk gowns in brown and dark red for Sundays, with wide shoulder-collars of heavy white embroidery. Blue serge, in-

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deed, was absent, except for their sailor suits for everyday and for the most startling innovation of all, their gymnasium suits.

Now those gymnasium suits had caused more problematical musing than all the other effects of the wardrobes combined. The college catalogue had announced them as necessities, and some forceful woman in a high position had sent explicit directions for their manufacture. And yet Father Wescott, when Cynthia and Mary turned around slowly before him, was frankly puzzled, and would, I fear, have been remonstrant had not the realization of his faith in legitimate authority prevented him. As for Mrs. Wescott, it is not too much to say that her sense of rectitude had been outraged. Indeed, upon the first trying on, she remarked with no lack of decision that she almost preferred her daughters to remain uneducated than to appear in such clothing. She became somewhat reconciled, however, when she discovered that if Cynthia and Mary remained perfectly stationary the bloomers might easily be mistaken for short and full skirts; and the girls were wise enough not to raise the objection

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that in all probability they could not stand still indefinitely in a gymnasium. Mrs. Wescott worried also over the local seamstress; for in spite of the tax imposed upon her ingenuity by the modeling of these extraordinary garments, she had taken occasion to express her opinion of them in no uncertain terms, and Mrs. Wescott did not feel that she could so impair her own dignity as to make a plea for secrecy.

But the passage of time had somewhat minimized even these forebodings, and the great day had come and gone, leaving Mrs. Wescott with ample time to study at close range the psychology of boyhood in the early teens, and plunging Mary and Cynthia into a sea of new events and places, new personalities and studies, which, after the first few days, allowed no room for homesickness.

They were, although they did not know it, particularly fortunate in the college life of their age. It was, in a sense, more peculiarly receptive than in these latter days. Like the hungry multitude waiting for the loaves and fishes, students "sat down" in order that they might be fed, and were miracu-

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lously supplied. In still another scriptural phrase, they "asked"; therefore, they received. And all this largely because the individual had not yet discovered himself through the aid of intelligence tests, vocational guidance, and other encouragements toward self-analysis. If Mary and Cynthia Wescott possessed complexes of various sorts, they were not made aware of the fact; and if they were temperamentally unsuited to quadratic equations, no one incited them to act upon this convenient truth. They and their associates without doubt missed much, but they escaped at least the minute dissection of their own natures, and were thus able in later years to be genially surprised upon the occasional discovery of themselves.

Vocational guidance they entirely escaped. No expert, after an interview of ten exhaustive minutes, told them for what they were best fitted. In those days young men and women did what seemed at the time the nearest and best thing to do. Mary and Cynthia, it is true, were more fortunate than most in this respect. Having known Mary Christmas, they needed no vocational

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adviser. Mary Wescott knew before she had been two years at college that the thing she was most interested in (that is, next to William Howe) was the study of races of people, their history, their customs, their possibilities in the light of American citizenship, and that, if she could only forget William, she wanted to work with such people in some great city. As for Cynthia, she had been sure, ever since the day when she played the penitent pilgrim in the snow, that she wanted to study great literature and some day to unlock for others the door to the majesty of its presence. She had another dream, too. Even more than she wanted to show to others the beauty and magic of words, she longed to write them herself — words that should make one feel the calm arrogance of bright noons on high, treeless plains, words that should suggest the intimacy of those same plains, silver-mantled, at midnight. And when she dreamed this dream a blue light, the color of harebells in sunshine, crept into her clear gray eyes and lingered there.

So it was that Mary Christmas went to

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college with Mary and Cynthia Wescott, the presence of her spirit enlightening and coloring their hopes and plans for the future. Once, indeed, she came herself, in gold-laced bodice and red silk handkerchief; for so many of Cynthia's themes had to do with Armenia, its plains, its saints, its legends, and with Mary Christmas herself, that her teacher, whose one passion in life was folklore, inquired about Mary Christmas and suggested that she be invited to come and sing her songs before a society with a long and learned name. Thereupon, the invitation was sent to Portland and received with much bewildered pride; and Mary Christmas, following Cynthia's directions to the letter, left her pushcart, her green suit, and her red hat, and journeyed to the college, where she was met by Mary and Cynthia and conducted before the learned society. There, her cheeks flushed and her dark eyes haunted by the same flames which had burned and glowed on that day so long ago beneath the orchard trees, she sang her songs, the songs of Vartan, of the Virgin and her festival, and of Artasches and Satenik, upon whom the gra-

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cious heavens showered gold and pearls. She told her stories, too — the old, familiar tales of her childhood and of theirs. Mary and Cynthia, sitting with their friends in the front of the room, were conscious of thousands of memories thronging back upon them. It was then, perhaps for the first time, that they realized fully the part that Mary Christmas had played in their lives; but, conscious of the scholastic atmosphere into which they had been suddenly thrust, they strove, in spite of the tears behind their eyes, to appear extremely academic. Meanwhile, the excited professor took notes furiously, and in due time published his "findings" in an article which left out Mary Christmas entirely, and which, since it was printed in the dullest of periodicals, was read only by himself and by other college professors.

In point of fact, Mary Christmas came once more to college, although this second visit was not generally known. She came one evening in the spring of Mary's and Cynthia's last year, and she brought Mary Westcott with her, much to the relief of Cynthia

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and of their house-mother, a tall, gaunt woman who felt her responsibilities. Waiting that afternoon in the Boston station for a train that would take her home after an unusual journey to that city for shopping in the larger markets, Mary Christmas was startled by the familiar face of Mary Wescott, now almost unfamiliar through anxiety and fear. She was sitting on the edge of one of the long waiting-seats, her scanty luggage beside her, her large eyes feverishly watching the unceasing line of people who came and went through the great doors. There was something about her strained, eager face, so intent upon the passing hundreds, that made Mary Christmas check her impulsive steps toward her and sit down at the farther end of the long seat just behind, from which, by rising occasionally, she could see without being seen.

Before a few minutes had passed she had become convinced that her own presence was quite safe from discovery. Mary Wescott had not the slightest interest in those about her. Her anxious gaze never for one moment left the great entrance doors. She was

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obviously waiting for someone, and, as Mary Christmas studied her face, she was convinced that that someone was no Wescott or chance relative unaccustomed to city ways.

When Mary Christmas heard the big man at the door call her train in his trumpet-like voice, she did not seize her big bundle and go. She waited yet another ten minutes — fifteen — twenty. Then through the station doors, his big suitcase indiscriminately bumping the shins of his fellow men, tore William Howe, with all the anxiety which could not find room on Mary's face on his own.

Mary Christmas allowed them five hungry minutes for looking at each other before she left her seat behind them. Perhaps she needed that time to swallow something big that had crept into her throat. And when she did approach them, still gazing at each other, the upbraiding words which she had planned quite left her tongue. For all at once, to her who had lived over again the sad passing of so many centuries, Mary and William had become suddenly very young and needy.

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Perhaps, as she came with such startling swiftness within their line of vision, they felt a high, classic rage at this retribution-bearing Nemesis; but they looked only like two children, fairly and inextricably caught. Mary Christmas did not say one word as she looked at them, and William felt it again incumbent upon him to manage the conversation, the motif of which, he quickly decided, must be determination at any cost.

"There is n't a bit of use for you to try to stop us, Mary Christmas," he began, looking appealingly at Mary, who had suddenly sat down again beside her luggage. "We're running away together, and we're going to be married. I've got the license, and we're more than twenty-one. Besides, it's a necessity. They won't let us be married this summer — even with all the prospects I've got and more than a thousand in the bank. They've just told Mary so. It's an outrage to make us wait! Just as if I could n't take care of her! In less than two years I'll be third vice-president of the company. It's as good as settled. So we've just decided to take matters into our own hands.

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And I tell you again, Mary Christmas, there is n't a bit of use for you to interfere."

Mary Christmas did not interfere. She looked at Mary Wescott, and knew by a prophetic gift of insight that Mary was trying to reconcile romance as she had pictured it with this sinking, frightful feeling in the region of her heart.

"Do you want to run away like this, Mary?" she asked gently.

"Yes," faltered Mary. "At least — I did — I *do* — because I think it's necessary. William needs me. He lives in a terrible boarding-house — and —"

"That's not it," broke in William, "at least it's not the main thing. The main thing is, they don't understand how we feel. They're unreasonable, like my father and mother. If I could n't support her, it would be different. But I can. Besides I've got reason to think that Mary's father does n't like me anyway." He looked now at Mary as though ties of blood demanded that she receive this accusation.

"It's William's politics," she faltered again. "He's a Democrat, and father *is* unreason-

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able. At Christmas, when I talked with him, he said he hoped William would change. But William won't!" Decision had crept into her voice. "And I'm glad! I would n't marry a man who would change his politics — even for my father."

Mary Christmas was quick to detect a quality which had crept into her last words.

"Even for your father." She repeated Mary's words. "Your father. How do you suppose he will feel when he hears you would not wait? And your mother, too?"

"It's not just a case of waiting," interrupted William, to the relief of Mary, who was in no condition to answer Mary Christmas' questions. "If we could be sure about a year from now — but we can't! And it's right about my politics. Mr. Wescott has insulted my party." William drew himself up proudly. "He has said openly that no intelligent person could be a Democrat."

"It's been awfully hard for William," said Mary from behind her handkerchief.

William consulted his watch. "There's no use standing here talking, Mary Christmas." There was finality in his tone. "I've got two

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friends waiting for us now, and we're due at the church at five o'clock. You can tell them that you saw us here if you like. Of course, we'll telegraph them just as soon as we're married. And they need n't any of them worry over Mary. I'll be good to her all my life — even if I am a Democrat! And I'm not urging her to be married this way. We talked it all over when I was out at college a week ago."

"They need n't blame William!" cried Mary with the last spurt of a dying spirit. "I planned it *all* — myself!"

For a moment Mary Christmas was in a quandary. Here was the time and place for the interference that must come; but how should she interpose it? And then something happened, almost miraculously, which took away all necessity for it.

"You know you have n't any right to interfere with us, Mary Christmas," cried William. "Not the least in the world!"

Then down upon Mary Wescott's tired head there came tumbling her house of romance, as a child's colored blocks fall which he has put together with too unsteady hands.

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Mary Christmas no right to interfere! She, who through all these years had lent color and light and reality to their world? *She*, no right?

"Oh, William!" sobbed Mary Wescott. And that was all.

There were among the guests at Mary Wescott's wedding, which was held on a Mary Christmas day the year following her graduation from college, those who wondered not a little critically when at the close of the ceremony the bride threw her arms around the neck of Mary Christmas before she had kissed even her own mother and father. There were those, too, who questioned the taste of the Wescotts in inviting Mary Christmas, even in a new suit and hat, to stand within the family circle. But there will always be those, as everyone is aware, and neither they nor anything else could mar the perfection of that Mary Christmas day.

It is quite safe to say also that not a few searching glances studied Father Wescott's face as he shook hands with his new son-in-

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law; but not one was keen enough to perceive that for which all had been sent — the assurance that, beneath his cordial acceptance of William, he was sadly reviewing a party's history from the Spoils System to Free Silver!

X

WAYSIDE SACRAMENTS

THE five years that followed Mary Wescott's wedding brought many changes into the lives of the persons who make this story. From the Wescott parents in partnership they exacted the unpleasant necessity of becoming accustomed to an empty house, although they did offer some compensation in the presentation of two grandsons, who, since they early favored their Grandfather Wescott in features, might very probably have inherited also his manner of looking at certain important matters. To Father Wescott himself those years were nothing short of cataclysmic. The entire West, he told Mrs. Wescott daily, was going crazy, the middle portion over that unsound principle of coöperation, and certain far States in their unprecedented stand upon the recall of judges. As though a party, dedicated from its early infancy to Progress, could

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look upon such extremists, at their best, as anything short of anarchists! The East must stand firm! Father Wescott accepted this decision as his battle-cry, and, with many misgivings, bought an automobile, a vehicle which itself demanded in those days no small amount of coöperation on the part of its owner. By means of this locomotion Father Wescott could exhort the county at least to stand firm in its loyalty to the safe and sane gentleman then in the presidential chair. This he did while Mrs. Wescott sat by his side in numberless dooryards, a patient listener to conversations which, she feared, must ultimately prove useful to her also, if someone did not stop those absurd women in Washington.

To Cynthia the years were kind, for not only did they convince her that she was doing the thing she loved most, which conviction is in itself no mean possession, but one of them took her to far places — to England, where she studied at Oxford and dreamed away long hours under the great trees at Iffley Church; to Germany, where she walked in the Harz Mountains and in Nuremberg

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ate cakes frosted with fairy tales; and to Paris, where she wandered for days through the Louvre, lived in the Latin Quarter, and in every other shop bought presents for her nephews. John and Roger, beneath the elms and in the echoing old halls of their father's and Mr. Longfellow's college, found life not unfriendly, though Greek was passing away and though a new and strange variety of poetry had begun to replace in the affection of students the long cadences of Mr. Algernon Swinburne. Indeed, John, who had taken to writing verses in private, composed in these new, uncertain measures some lines descriptive of an ancient church, standing within gray walls and bathed in more ancient moonlight.

Nor in the life of Mary Christmas had Time been idle, though in outward semblance she bore few marks of its changes. At fifty, after nearly twenty years of traveling on foot, heavily laden and the prey of all weathers, she was singularly little worn. Her hair was still more black than gray, and her eyes, although at times they harbored an unfathomable sadness, had not lost their

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glow. Still she pushed her red cart up and down the coast roads — roads which now too often echoed with the snorts and puffs of vehicles akin to Mr. Wescott's; still she arranged to reach the Wescott village in early June. Not once, indeed, did she deviate from that now long-established custom, even when the assurance of the later arrival of the four Wescotts, vacation-bound, might have tempted her to postpone her coming. Then she saw in midsummer or early fall, often making the journey by rail and by stage particularly for that purpose; but her first visit of every spring continued to occur, as it had begun, with the drifting of the petals and the drying of the roads.

Those who understood her best saw in this tenaciousness an almost pathetic adherence to custom, which, as she grew older, became not only the dominating motive in her life but also the source of untold strength and comfort. Shorn and stripped by the very force of circumstances of those observances which, hallowed by centuries of reverent usage, had come down to her, she clung to the places and persons that, upon her first

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coming to this new land, had been most closely identified with the old. For, kind as had been this country of her adoption with its easy peace and plenty, she felt as she grew older a disquieting sense of its incompleteness and of her own strangeness within its welcoming gates. Thus it happened that when Raphael, now a prosperous American business man in a cigar store, bought and furnished by his mother's capital, refused to answer her when she spoke to him in his native language, and when the new Scandinavian husband of little Mary laughed stupidly at the cakes which, on the days commemorating ancient festivals, she brought into his bakeshop, she longed for the drying of the familiar roads along which she had left the thoughts and memories of so many years.

Those winding coast roads, which led around quiet coves where herons stood in the clear, still water, past stretches of gray, wind-vexed sea and over upland pastures fragrant with bayberry, mitigated in some degree the tragedy in which Mary Christmas as the years went by had found herself

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an unwilling actor. It was the old, bitter tragedy of Age contending with Youth and going down before it — a tragedy older than that of Lear or of Isaac and his sons, old as life itself, and enhanced a thousandfold in its cruelty when enacted by immigrant children who willingly crush beneath their feet all that their parents have held sacred. Defeated at home, Mary Christmas took to the long familiar roads, in the courses of which during those first years she had lived over again so much of her life. Along that particularly lonely stretch of woodland she had sung of Vartan; under that great pine which afforded such a sweep of tossing blue water she had imagined that she was looking upon the Mediterranean, her homesick eyes dim with tears; in that clump of sumach, red in the September sunshine, she had fallen asleep and dreamed that avenging blood was flowing in the far city of Erzerum; in country lanes, in farmhouse kitchens, and beneath blossoming apple-trees she had told to wide-eyed children her tales of saints and heroes, and of holy places.

These landmarks of the woods and coast

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villages lent a consistency and coherence to her life as she grew older, which not even the complete emancipation of Raphael and little Mary could entirely disturb. Through her repeated visits to them and her eager reception of those sacramental elements of which they were the symbols, she kept close the past with all its beneficence. It was doubtless in an effort to strengthen this coherence of which she felt such need that, the year following Mary Wescott's marriage and that of her own Mary, she discarded her suit and hat and returned to the gold-laced bodice and the red silk handkerchief. These she never again relinquished, in spite of the pressure at home and the fast changing modes of those complacent years.

She knew the coast of Maine as few natives knew it and was its best chronicler during those early years of the new century. She watched the invasion alike of the summer sojourner and the automobile, and looked upon both with displeasure, although with the advent of the former there was increased wealth for her. The latter she scorned to employ except in the worst of weathers, when

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she would occasionally allow some friendly passer-by to carry her to her next stopping-place, the red pushcart bumping along over the stones in the rear; for she hated its choking, sputtering voice along the quiet roads and its rude disturbance of her solitude. She watched children who had feared her upon her first visits grow to maturity and marry; she brought gifts to their children. And each year in graveyards above the sea she saw new white stones, stark and ugly in the wind-swept grass. Before these she would pause not infrequently, to cross herself and to say a prayer for the spirits of those who had learned to look upon her with kindness.

XI

SHORT TWILIGHTS AND DRIFTING PETALS

IT was just five years after Mary Wescott's wedding that, following unprecedented events in Europe, blood did begin to flow in Erzerum, as in Mary Christmas' dream beneath the sumachs. But it was not avenging blood; and in those awestruck days when the world was rudely shaken from its serenity, the horror of it was lessened in minds already jaded by atrocities. In the mind of Mary Christmas, however, it eclipsed all other catastrophes. The compelling hideousness of it drove sleep from her tired eyes and within them lighted that red gleam which so many years ago had frightened the Wescotts at their quiet table. She was tormented day and night by the intensity of the fire within her. Seeking blindly the comfort that lies in common suffering, she pushed the papers with their ghastly, burdened words between the elbows

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of Raphael as he leaned upon his cigar case and pondered his stock; but he, after an impatient glance, turned to the quotations on the tobacco market. Little Mary, it is true, wept with her mother for a few secret moments, but her eyes never left the door through which her husband might at any minute come to stare at her and to shrug his big shoulders.

The next two years, driven by a restlessness that dislodged even the sacredness of custom, Mary Christmas began her country traveling early and continued it late. The very exercise of walking long miles over bad roads, muddy in the spring, frozen and rutty in late autumn, loosened the tension under which she was living. Moreover, in the outlying villages and farming districts there were those who, in the light of present events, listened more eagerly to her stories of ancient wrong and cruel aggression, and gave her not only the sympathy for which she had craved, but the more welcome support of their own righteous indignation.

Finally, as the months dragged themselves wearily into years, she found in Father Wes-

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cott an outlet for all her pent-up hostility and for her growing resentment toward those governmental heads who were willing to watch and wait while ships were sunk, and disaster, confusion, and death stalked from the English Channel to the Persian Gulf. He not only shared the resentment of Mary Christmas; he fed it with his own indignant protests. If *his* party were in Washington, he told her, things would be different! Mary Christmas knew nothing of parties, but her worshipful gaze, which the years had not dimmed, told him as plainly as words that in her opinion the country had made one incomprehensible error in judgment when it had overlooked him as leader of its destinies. And although Father Wescott's native modesty did not allow him for a moment to share her opinion, he did echo the sputterings of his automobile as he told his town and county what he thought of the Administration!

But Father Wescott and Mary Christmas waited yet more months before the country righted itself in their estimation — months during which Father Wescott forgot that his business was law and Mary Christmas

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that hers was trade, during which Roger and John, the one in the Law School at Cambridge, the other at the foot of the ladder in a Boston firm, studied reluctantly, all the while conscious that in spite of themselves they were marking time.

In the early spring of 1917, impelled by the certainty that watchful waiting was at last at an end and by the bitter, awful knowledge, which she until now had been unwilling to admit to herself, that no avenging spirit would ever quicken her son, Mary Christmas escaped to the country while the frost was still in the roads and before the first arbutus, blooming in the cold moss of some woodland rock, touched the misty air with its perfect fragrance. The last three years had left indelible marks upon her in the thinness of her face and in the lines now irretrievably set about her mouth, in the haunting depths of her eyes and the sagging of her shoulders. They had marked her spirit, too, though that flickered on, choked and smothered, it is true, but wanting only draught and fuel to flame again.

Both were supplied, miraculously it seemed

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to her, in mid-April. For three weeks she had plodded tirelessly on through days of intermittent mist and rain along the most remote of her routes, her thoughts inextricably entangled in a web in which relief over the declaration of war struggled with bitterness over the indifference which this new country had so mysteriously engendered in her children. And while she pushed her red cart over the roads, depending for hospitality upon the kindness of those to whom for years she had ministered in a way she little understood, two young men in uniform decided to stay for an afternoon in Portland on their way home to say good-bye to their father and mother. What happened that afternoon in the cigar store of Raphael Christmas only one of the three to-day could tell you; but there must have been something persuasive about the square shoulders of the older visitor and the straight brown eyes of the younger, for, the next day but one, a big Scandinavian sold tobacco to whoever wanted it, and told anybody who asked that the proprietor had gone to war.

Stopping in a small village to get the pa-

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pers of three days past, Mary Christmas saw on the front page of one of them a picture and a story which set the muscles of her arms and legs into such tremor that she could with difficulty push her cart through the gate of the adjoining churchyard and up to the steps of the white church. Here she gratefully sat down in a warm ray of sunshine and tried to sense it all. And as she saw Raphael's dark face gazing into her own and read the words that told of the Erzerum tragedy of more than twenty years ago and that spoke of Raphael as a hero, ready to avenge, she felt care slip from her shoulders just as years before she had felt quick relief upon the setting down of her great bundle on some friendly doorstep. She felt, too, as she sat there in the sunlight, the rekindling of her spirit, which, now smothered no longer, burst again into ready flame. If John Wescott could have seen her then, leaning back against the paneled door of the old church, her red silk handkerchief on her shoulders, the sun catching alike the light from the gold coins in her ears and from the tears that rolled down her

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tired face, he would have felt convinced that the impulsive extra hour which he took to interview the city editor of a Portland paper and which cost him six hours at home was well worth the price.

When Mary Christmas had convinced herself by twelve more readings that what the words said was indeed true, she left the church steps, stopping only to fold the miraculous paper within her gold-laced bodice and to say a prayer of thanksgiving, and wheeled her cart into a neighboring barn. Here she left it while she journeyed by stage to the nearest sizable town, returning the next day with the necessary purchases for the new work which, she decided, had become hers to perform. From her packages she brought forth an American flag with which she covered her cart, and tiny flags of the Allies which she tacked securely in the corners. Thus decorated, and armed with a veritable sword of the spirit, she started forth, choosing the most outlying roads she knew.

That spring and summer, and late into the fall, she forgot her business of selling in this new and self-imposed task of recruiting

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for the army. Into the most remote of farming districts she pushed her gay cart; in farmhouse kitchens, at crossroads, and among groups of men at work in the hayfields she gave her stirring message. Nor did she scorn to use any and every means of persuasion. When the story of her own wrong at the hands of the enemy failed to arouse more than an ill-expressed compassion, when the plea for making the world secure against tyranny and the simple urge of natural patriotism were not provocative of determination, her racial shrewdness came to her aid with the suggestion of expediency.

"They will make you go soon," she would cry to half a dozen young men, impressed in spite of themselves. "Soon they will come and take you whether you want to go or not. You are not such a hero then! Go now — like my son here! Go now and offer yourselves! That is the way!"

Reluctantly she left the roads when the lowering skies foretold snow and when the hurrying November sun set in a horizon of pale green beneath overhanging clouds of purple. That winter she gave up her trade

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among the railroad towns, and, instead of weaving laces, knit rough socks of gray wool, sitting with little Mary in the hot back room of the bakeshop. A peace came to brood over her in those days with their short twilights. It made her oblivious of her toil-racked body, and in some strange, quiet way quenched the flames of her spirit until they glowed in a clear, steady light, a "light that never was on sea or land." And when another spring with its drifting petals brought her the news that Raphael had given his life in France to avenge his father's death and to alleviate, if but for a little time, the suffering of the world, she was quite content.

The drifting petals of that spring brought a message to the Wescott village also, a message that made Father Wescott again walk up the street with his collar and tie in their rightful places. He looked old and stooped as he opened the white gate and went up the driveway in the drowsy, contented hum of bees and the sweet odor of apple blossoms in warm sunlight. He did not go back to his office that day or the next, but sat

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with Mrs. Wescott in the library or helped her with the housework, which must be done as carefully and methodically as though they were not surrounded by some grim, overwhelming presence. And on the third afternoon, as they sat in the library, Mr. Wescott pasting stray leaves in old books and Mrs. Wescott darning some table linen which she had twice thrown away, they heard the grating of the driveway gravel and saw between the porch shutters a quick flash of red and black and gold. Then Mary Christmas burst open the door, and, after throwing herself at Father Wescott's feet, sat with them quietly until the shadows on the orchard grass grew longer and a little girl drove her cow down the hill.

But after her lunch of sandwiches and milk she did not go until she had entered into every room of the great, empty house. Sitting together in the library, they heard her softened footsteps upstairs, visiting every one — that in which Roger had been born, those where he had played and slept, and in each they heard her high, quavering voice singing a prayer-song for the rest of his

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spirit. Downstairs too she knelt and prayed — in the library where he had read his books, in the dining-room where he had eaten, even in the great old stable where so many years ago he had played the part of the priest in the Etchmiadzin church. Then, her sacrifice ended, she went her way up the hill.

An hour later it came to them who still sat in the library that she had looked old and tired as she had said good-bye. They might so easily have taken her on her way! Father Wescott, reproving himself for his thoughtlessness, coaxed his car into reluctant motion, and with Mrs. Wescott beside him choked up the hill to overtake Mary Christmas and to carry her to her next stopping-place or, better still, to bring her back again with them.

They did not go far. By the path that led to the pasture bars and thence to Mary Wescott's boulder, they saw the familiar red cart, still bedecked with its colors. Halting the car beside it, they hurried up the path, over the hummocks starred with violets, and through the alders to the boulder. There by

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the spring, beneath a wild plum-tree, white with bloom, lay Mary Christmas in the evening light, her face relaxed, her busy hands at rest. A song sparrow on the stunted pine tree filled the still air with notes like crystals in sunlight, and a robin called from the wild crab-apple on the hill. But Father and Mother Wescott knew, as they stood there looking upon the quiet face beneath the white blossoms, that Mary Christmas' restless, shining spirit was heeding none of these. It had gone, they knew, in a quick flash of light across the gray, tossing ocean, to her own land, where for a season it would wander with the winds on treeless plains, look upon the ark which no eye had seen, and leave its healing power in the dim aisles of the church at Etchmiadzin. Then, satisfied and at peace, it would go to dwell in the Everlasting Halls of God!

XII

MARY CHRISTMAS DAYS

THERE are still Mary Christmas days in the Wescott village — days when the sun lies warm on the orchard grass and the petals drift through the bright air like great lazy snowflakes. Then Father Wescott puts away the town report and certain prophetic statistics as to the fall election, closes the office, and comes home at noon for the day, swinging up the street in precisely the manner of so many years ago. In the afternoon, under the apple trees, he drowzes a bit over his paper, unless there happens to be a disturbing article on the spread of Radicalism, while the bees hum among the blossoms, and while Mrs. Wescott, whom the right of franchise has not changed a whit, completes a red mitten for her oldest grandson. But when the shadows grow longer and the village children drive home their cows, they talk of Mary Christmas. In the evening, as they sit

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on the porch, Mrs. Wescott wears a shawl in whose delicate trceries are birds and butterflies, stars and tired sheep. Once Father Wescott shamefacedly took a string of red stones from his pocket and put it around his neck, where it glowed against his white collar and shirt, red as the geraniums in the porch boxes or as great drops of blood. It must be admitted, however, that during this procedure he was genuinely embarrassed and kept a vigilant eye on the driveway and the door.

North of Boston, in the city where William Howe, still a Democrat, is now president of his company, there are Mary Christmas days. When the first one comes in June, Mary Wescott hurries home from a mothers' meeting or from the League of Women Voters, gives the surprised maid the remainder of the day, and gets dinner herself. Then, while she prepares the baby's orange juice (for the times simply demand that she renounce sulphur and molasses), she tells the children of Mary Christmas and of all the manifold things that, because of Mary Christmas, happened to her when she was

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a little girl. William comes home as the light softens to find a rush of children at the gate, apple blossoms on the table, and Mary in a blue gingham apron with some flour on her pink cheek. And that evening in a quiet house they wonder what on earth they can give their children to compensate for no Mary Christmas!

In the college town where Cynthia lives there are Mary Christmas days. When one steals over the campus and lures students from their books, Cynthia, too, is lured from Jeremy Taylor and Richard Baxter and other ecclesiastical heroes who, colleges so often decree, shall be studied in the spring. Forgetting them all for a season, Cynthia talks about words — the glory and magic that lie in so many of them: *silent, holy, high, garden*. And as her students listen, perhaps a trifle wonderingly, they see a blue light, the color of harebells in sunshine, creep into her clear gray eyes and linger there. But, although they do not know it, there is one word that she does not name — a word of three letters which years ago unlocked for her the treasure-house of ages.

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There are Mary Christmas days in the city where John works, the city of Mr. Longfellow and, during her sojourn, of Mary Christmas herself. Now John has grown into one of those mysterious men who know all about stocks and bonds and reserve banks and the other entanglements of high finance. When he reads that "East Cuba Sugar $7\frac{1}{2}$ s were active in $106\frac{1}{4}$," he is no more puzzled than you or I when we read that "Mr. and Mrs. Brown left immediately for Kansas City and points west." Moreover, upon occasion he can talk in such terms. But when a Mary Christmas day brings drifting petals to the old gardens in Portland, and the sun lies warm on St. Stephen's church, John forgets all matters of high finance. His associates have even known him to become irritated when asked a simple question concerning Missouri Pacific 4s. A restlessness drives him early from the office and sets him walking far into the country, along a coast road where the long shadows of the trees are mirrored in the still water. It is late when he comes back to his rooms, but not too late for him to light his pipe and to sit by his open

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window in the white moonlight. And more than once on nights like these — though we confess it in the strictest confidence — he has drawn from a faded green-and-gold box in his trunk a silk cap with many colors in orderly rows. This he puts upon his head in a most absurd fashion, for it is much too small for him; and, watching the blue spirals of smoke, he dreams of a certain day long ago when his father came up the street, *wearing his collar and tie!*



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